

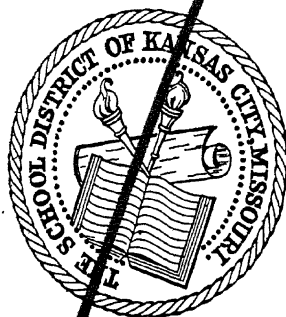
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by George Jean Nathan

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The Theatre Book of the Year

1947  1948

The THEATRE Book
OF THE YEAR

1947 ✦ 1948

A Record and an Interpretation

B Y

GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

ALFRED



A. KNOPF

NEW YORK : 1948

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FIRST EDITION

Foreword

FOLLOWERS OF THESE annual surveys are, I fear, sometimes disturbed by their degree of critical dispraise. That the detraction often exceeds the commendation I regretfully am forced to admit. But, if my point of view is thought to have any merit, I see no way out of the dilemma. The fact is that genuine worth in our theatre in the last few years has been of no noticeable bulk, that the great majority of new plays have been devoid of quality, and that, so far as I am concerned, that seems to be the only proper manner in which to report on them.

I well appreciate that, whatever may be cynically said to the contrary, praise is always more popular than blame. The critic so constituted that he can find good miscellaneously is consequently esteemed far above the one so peculiarly constituted that he can find it only where it actually exists. It is my misfortune in this respect that I was born under an unpropitious star. As a result, I am not, I grieve, approved as I should be; I am not invited to serve on more than fifty or so of the usual hundred committees to save the theatre; I have not been vouchsafed a seat at a banquet chicken and its collateral string beans for some years; and I am not overburdened with boodle.

But, desolate as I find myself and yearn as I do for the admiring plaudits of the masses, I can do naught but pursue my haplessly inoculated and depressing course. If you think that I take any secret pleasure in it, you are mistaken; I say freely that I get little or no comfort from it. Like everyone else I wish for a theatre all of whose plays and productions would be such that my writings on them would be as warmly acceptable as currently are those of some of my venerated and envied colleagues. But, since

any such theatre seems to exist only in the latter's over-active imaginations, I suspect that I must patiently wait for the realization of my prayer and in the meantime comment on it as it happens to be. If, therefore, the proportion of eulogy to condemnation is out of balance, I seek apology and maybe even absolution in the circumstances.

It is not, surely, that I am so vain as to believe that my opinion is usually right and that of others usually wrong, though I confess a lamentable suspicion now and then tortures me. It is rather that, right or wrong, I can not see any sense or virtue in the profession of criticism, after more than forty years in its service, if it does not at all times, let the chips fall where they will, perform its offices with only the strictest standards in mind, with no slightest compromise in the misguided interests of a periodically sick and needy theatre, and with indifference to any reader reaction either favorable or unfavorable. That I accordingly must often seem a little hard and even odious to those given in all things to the light that shines in charity's eyes is unavoidable. But I certainly am very far from offering myself in the greasepaint role of martyr. I am no more a martyr than I am a crusader, an evangelist, or a genius. I am merely a commentator with, I hope, some possibly rational critical overtones. That many people disagree with my findings is a pleasure I am not one to deny them. That a few may agree only dooms them with me in any politely optimistic society.

The theatrical year covered in the following pages was all in all an indifferent one and, since a succession of uncomplimentary chapters would be tedious, I have tried where possible to make them readable apart from their dire content and even now and again extrinsically diverting, much as the entrepreneur of an old small-time vaudeville bill distracted his customers from its monotony by deliberately letting a member of the trained dog act jump over the footlights, run into the auditorium, and bite the candy-butcher in the leg. The relatively few opportunities I have enjoyed for praise I have taken full advantage of,

and with deep personal satisfaction and gratitude, since they have served to lighten the strain by providing green oases in the ploughed-up desert.

Here, then, is the theatrical season of the years of Our Lord 1947 and 1948 as seen through the eyes of your chronicler. The record speaks, though ventriloquially, for itself.

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The Theatre Book of the Year
19471948

The Year's Productions

THE TELEPHONE and THE MEDIUM

MAY 1, 1947

Short operas by Gian-Carlo Menotti. Produced by Chandler Cowles and Efrem Zimbalist, Jr., in association with Edith Luytens for 6 months' performances in the Barrymore Theatre.

PROGRAM

THE TELEPHONE

LUCY	Marilyn Cotlow	BEN	Frank Rogier
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THE MEDIUM

MONICA	Evelyn Keller	MRS. GOBINEAU	Beverly Dame
TOBY	Leo Coleman	MR. GOBINEAU	Frank Rogier
MADAME FLORA (BABA)		MRS. NOLAN	Virginia Beeler
	Marie Powers		

SYNOPSIS: The action takes place in Madame Flora's parlor, in our time. Act I. Evening. Act II. Evening, a few days later.

Director: Gian-Carlo Menotti.

SET TO MUSIC initiatedly composed and sometimes technically interesting, if Puccini influenced, over-all scarcely distinguished and nothing to induce prolonged critical pause, *The Medium*, with its libretto of a fraudulent spiritualist who terrifiedly falls under the spell of her own chicanery, periodically projects a dramatic chill seldom experienced from the so-called thrillers of Broadway commerce. So effective in this quarter is the two-act opera in considerable part that it is to be regretted that the author-composer's imagination does not more fully suffice him. The séance in which the charlatan, aided by her daughter and a mute gypsy boy whom she has adopted, plays on the emo-

tions of clients who seek communion with their dear departed has a cruel irony that grips. So, too, have the scenes in which the conniving medium suddenly goes pale at the feel of a ghostly hand at her throat and in which she is beset by the same spooky fears which she has sold for gain to her susceptible trade. But the mood collapses when, in her frenzied determination to lay the ghost within herself, she shoots into a closet out of which presently tumbles the dead body of her mute confederate. This makes little dramatic sense, unless one ruptures one's mental powers. The ghost-slaying idea would have been more relevant to the theme and much more significant had the dead body been made that of the medium herself in replica.

Under the immediate general circumstances it is occasionally difficult to decipher Menotti's dramatic intention. There are times when it seems that he is attempting to picture the indissolubility of the real and the spirit worlds. There are other times when he appears to be trying to paraphrase the Frankenstein theme. And there are still others when what he is up to seems to be the philosophical despair that only in silence (as represented by the mute) is there to be found paradoxically the Sphinxian answer to the riddle of the unknowable, a thesis perhaps more notable for its nonsense than for its profundity. Music naturally comes to his aid in his confusion and he makes valuable dramatic use of it. But what might have been a consistently eerie excursion into the metaphysic of Pirandello becomes now and then muddled through an unclear and unsustained fancy.

The one-act *The Telephone*, which is offered as a curtain-raiser and which spoofs the nuisance that the instrument can be, is intermittently ingenious in a musical direction, particularly in its humorous orchestrations, but in the aggregate forced, much too long, overdone, and tiresome. The first time the telephone interrupts the swain's proposal of marriage, the idea is entertaining enough, but, as the business goes on and on, what amusement there initially was gradually fades and expires.

Though Menotti, judging solely from the two exhibits

— I am not familiar with his *Amelia Goes To The Ball*, *The Island God*, *The Old Maid And The Thief*, or *Sebastian* — seems partly to share with various of his fellow moderns a doubt of melody, or at least anything that too closely approaches it, he fortunately does not join their eccentricity in an avoidance of emotion. Altogether too much of the music of these moderns sounds as if it had been conceived and composed by their mothers-in-law. Menotti's agreeably strives for some warmth, feeling, and passion. There is in it, also, whatever its shortcomings, the suggestion of a nimble intellect, whether light, as in *The Telephone*, or serious, as in *The Medium*.

The voices are acceptable enough, though Marie Powers' in the medium's role suffers from what seems to be a slight lisp, and Evelyn Keller's, in that of her daughter, from a periodic tendency to shrillness. The acting, however, is another matter. While perhaps not any more criticizable than much of that at the Metropolitan, it is at its best, save for Leo Coleman's performance of the mute, either uncomfortably self-conscious, as in the instance, particularly, of Marilyn Cotlow and Frank Rogier in *The Telephone*, or of a piece with the wood winds minus the wind. The physical production of *The Medium* calls, however, for favorable words. Though obviously economical, Horace Armistead's setting and Jean Rosenthal's lighting are considerably superior to three-fourths of the expensive kind of thing we generally get in the Broadway theatre.

HEADS OR TAILS. MAY 2, 1947

A comedy by S. J. Lengsfelder and Ervin Drake. Produced by Your Theatre, Inc., for 29 performances in the Cort Theatre.

PROGRAM

CORNELIUS T. SHELDON		BARNEY MCGILL	<i>Ralph Simone</i>
	<i>Les Tremayne</i>	ERIC PETERSEN	<i>Werner Klemperer</i>
AMY	<i>Lulu Belle Clarke</i>	MRS. WARREN	<i>Lelah Tyler</i>
HELEN SHELDON	<i>Audra Lindley</i>	ERNEST MILFORD	<i>Joseph Graham</i>
BURTON SNEAD	<i>Joseph Silver</i>	MR. GREEN	<i>Anthony Gray</i>
FRANK JONES	<i>Gregory Robbins</i>	SEÑOR COSTAMARO	<i>Frank de Kova</i>
MARION GILMORE	<i>Lucie Lancaster</i>	HUMPERDINCK	<i>Richard Barron</i>
ALICE MILFORD	<i>Jean Cobb</i>	M McNULTY	<i>Paul Lipson</i>
PHILIP MCGILL	<i>Jed Prouty</i>		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The terrace of the country home of Cornelius Sheldon. Saturday morning.* Scene 2. *Barney McGill's office. Several days later.* Act II. Scene 1. *The terrace. Afternoon of the same day.* Scene 2. *The Milford living-room. Wednesday evening.* Act III. *The terrace. The 13th of the month, Cornelius's birthday; late afternoon.*

Director: *Edward F. Cline.*

THE PROGRAM announced that Mr. Lengsfelder, of whom no one locally had ever before heard and whose name was to be searched for in the European records in vain, "has had more than forty successful productions to his credit." The successful productions were thus perhaps scarcely connected with the theatre and, if not purely a figment of the press-agent's imagination, were possibly babies, though that, too, is doubtful if the gentleman's biological fertility was to be estimated in proportion to his dramatic. Nothing worse than his theatrical offspring has been suffered by the stage in years. A portion of the blame is possibly to be borne by the collaborator whom he summoned to his assistance. This gentleman, according to the same program, was "a special material writer for Milton Berle and other top comedians" and his function seemed to be to insert jokes into Mr. Lengsfelder's script whenever it called for

some humor, which was not only often but always. Since the jokes were of the vintage species of the one about the couple celebrating their twentieth anniversary and were now going to get married, it appeared that Mr. Lengsfelder should have looked somewhat farther afield for an auxiliary genius.

The plot had to do with two men in love with the same woman, their toss of a coin to determine which would commit suicide and leave the way clear for the other, and the efforts of an insurance broker who had insured the loser to forestall his self-destruction. The writing sounded as if it had been dictated by one backward tot to another; the acting was even worse than the direction, which was morbid; and the settings by Watson Barrett looked as if he had read the script and had decided to get even. The enterprise was predicated on a profit sharing plan, dreamed up by the metaphysical Mr. Lengsfelder, which promised each ticket purchaser his proportionate share of the financial rewards. The program again confided that "after overcoming initial obstacles, enthusiastic response greeted the plan, so that Your Theatre, Inc., has over three thousand subscribers and one hundred and forty-two church and civic organizations." After the first act, those of the suckers who were present catapulted themselves out of the theatre to consult their solicitors on the possibility that their sharing contracts did not contain non-assessment clauses.

RESPECTFULLY YOURS. MAY 13, 1947

A comedy by Peggy Lamson. Produced by the Blackfriars' Guild for 14 performances in the Blackfriars' Theatre.

PROGRAM

LYDIA GREENLEAF	Anne Follmann	MRS. McCLAIN	Ethel Kenney
ALEX GREENLEAF	Kevin McCloskey	MR. McCLAIN	Owen Dickson
DORIS	Mary Morgan	PHOTOGRAPHER	Allen Stapleton
CARL GREENLEAF	Clifford West	MISS RIGGS	May Burkan
CONNIE GREENLEAF	Doris Sward	WILLIAM VAN NESS	Alfred Reilly
ALAN WALKER	Henry Hart	MISS VINSON	Jean Emslie

The scene is the Greenleafs' living-room, Cambridge, Mass.

Time: 1912.

Director: Marjorie Hildreth.

IN THE six years of its existence, the Blackfriars' Guild has produced twenty-three plays more or less experimental in nature. With this, its twenty-fourth production, it abandoned, for reasons best known to itself, anything of an even remotely experimental character and went minor Broadway with a wholly conventional whistle-stop comedy that had been presented for failure three years before, under the title, *Bee In Her Bonnet*, in a Southern road town and on which options had subsequently been taken by several Broadway producers, also for reasons best known to themselves, but who soon thereafter dropped them, for reasons now best known to everybody.

The theme of the waif script is the trouble brought upon a Harvard professor in the painfully respectable campus atmosphere of thirty-five years ago by his wife's publication of a pre-Dale Carnegie opuscle called *How To Command Respect At Home*. Since in the thirty-five year period elapsed we have had a sufficient number of exhibits in which the publication of something or other has brought embarrassment in its train, the idea has become pretty

May 13, 1947

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tired and would need considerable wit and humor to revitalize it. These Miss Lamson does not sufficiently command, and her play dies in its tracks half an hour after it gets under puffing way.

PORTRAIT IN BLACK. MAY 14, 1947

A so-called psychological thriller by Ivan Goff and Ben Roberts. Produced by David Lowe and Edgar F. Luckenbach for 61 performances in the Booth Theatre.

PROGRAM

TANIS TALBOT	Claire Luce	COB O'BRIEN	Barry Kelley
GRACIE MCPHEE	Mary Michael	RUPERT MARLOWE	
PETER TALBOT	David Anderson		Sidney Blackmer
WINIFRED TALBOT		DR. PHILIP GRAHAM	Donald Cook
	Dorothea Jackson	BLAKE RITCHIE	Thomas Coley

SYNOPSIS: The entire action of the play takes place in the drawing-room of the Talbot home in San Francisco. Act I. Scene 1. An autumn afternoon. Scene 2. The following morning. Act II. Scene 1. Three nights later. Scene 2. Three days later, afternoon. Act III. The same night.

Director: Reginald Denham.

THE DEMAND most often imposed upon the spectator by one of these psychological thrillers is, first, that his psychological education shall have bloomed and stopped with the "You can't pull that trigger" scene in Augustus Thomas' *The Witching Hour* and, secondly, that his spine shall be of the sort which curdles in inverse ratio to the amount of a stage's illumination. I do not wish to pose as the possessor of either a knowledge of the science that would have shaken Freud to his foundations or of a backbone that is impervious to titillation, at least of sorts, but the average play of the kind none the less ever impresses me as a book on psychology for freshman classes with a cap pistol hidden in it. I do not say that what little psychology there is in the plays may not sometimes be sound enough. I only say that it is so childishly elementary that to label it with the high-sounding scientific term is like calling *Peg o' My Heart* an analytical treatise on love. What is more, there is generally not so much of it in any such play as you will find in even a run-of-the-mill Broadway comedy. The thrills, further-

more, are usually little other than fabricated feather-tickles. They do not operate toward the spine through the mind but merely shout "Boo!" at the juvenile sensibilities. As drama, they have no more authenticity than the dropping of a tin tray behind a vaudeville comedian; they are fright-wigs pulled by strings attached to typewriters.

The Messrs. Goff's and Roberts' version of the toy mechanism has to do with a jezebel and her doctor lover who conspire to insert a lethal needle into the chronic invalid who is the former's husband and thus clear the way for their joint passion. An anonymous letter shortly informs them that someone else is privy to their misdeed. In their dread of being unmasked, they do away with a male visitor to the house whose manner seems to indicate that it was he who dispatched the missive. But no sooner has he been murdered than comes still another anonymous letter. After a number of scenes between a pair of comedy servants and a pair of young lovers, lugged in to lend the ulcerated proceedings some relief and, even more obviously, to kill time, it is disclosed that the letters were written by the psychopathic hussy herself, her explanation being that she feared she might lose the love of the medico and sought this means to keep him, in his terror, close to her.

Since, among other things, the woman wrote and sent the first letter immediately following the murder of her husband and since her accomplice was at the time profoundly enamoured of her and apparently could not be drawn away from her by a team of horses, plausibility gets its first blow. Since it is more than obvious that the bed-ridden husband, who is stated not to have had married relations with his wife for almost ten years, could not have stood in the way of the lovers, who were demonstratedly very hot not only under their collars, plausibility gets its second. Since, subsequently, the medico, who is presented as a shrewd and observing creature, would readily from the jade's actions have quickly seen through her, his long delay in using his eyes in that quarter gives plausibility its third. And since all kinds of plays like the previous season's *Little A* have instructed audiences in suspecting cheating wives

twenty minutes after the curtain has gone up, interest in the whole gets its first, second, third, and knockout.

The present dramaturgy follows the customary pattern of throwing suspicion on a sinister butler, having the frightened small son of the household intrude upon the scene immediately following the crack of a murderous revolver ("There's nothing wrong, dear; go back to bed"), arousing a character's suspicions upon his casual discovery of something that has been thrown into a grate fire, introducing a ringing of the telephone bell in the midst of the twain's second malfeasance and the cautious removal of the receiver from the hook, etc. The dialogue is alternately either of a rhetorical elegance ("What love is this that feeds on death?") or of the cliché sort sufficiently suggested by "I love you" — "You don't even know the meaning of the word!" and (shades of *Mrs. Dane's Defence*) "I was young; I didn't know; he took advantage of my innocence." A last minute change reduced the play from three acts to two, which was the only improvement upon the species anywhere perceptible.

That the enterprise was doomed to commercial failure should have been known to its sponsors, and for a reason producers of greater practical experience would have appreciated. A melodramatic thriller whose general tone is depressing, as in this case, is inevitably headed for the storehouse. The successes have always been those whose murders are paradoxically exhilarating.

The stage direction, while intermittently satisfactory, relied too greatly on slow motion, long pauses, and dread lookings into space to induce a sense of trepidation in the audience. Claire Luce, in the hussy role, though an improved actress, was furthermore permitted such an excess of cold postures and refrigerated hauteur that her doctor lover, suavely played by Donald Cook, would have had to prescribe allopathic doses of yohimbin and mustard plasters before enjoying relations with her. The rest of the company pursued the conventional acting design of such plays so closely that they could have stepped without rehearsal into any one of a dozen of them.

 LOVE FOR LOVE. MAY 26, 1947

A revival of the comedy by William Congreve, with incidental music by Leslie Bridgewater. Produced by the Theatre Guild and John C. Wilson in association with H. M. Tennent Ltd. for 48 performances in the Royale Theatre.

PROGRAM

VALENTINE	John Gielgud	ANGELICA	Pamela Brown
JEREMY	Richard Wordsworth	SIR SAMPSON LEGEND	
SCANDAL	George Hayes		Malcolm Keen
TATTLE	Cyril Ritchard	MRS. FORESIGHT	Marian Spencer
MRS. FRAIL	Adrianne Allen	MISS PRUE	Jessie Evans
FORESIGHT	John Kidd	BEN	Robert Flemyng
ROBIN	Donald Bain	BUCKRAM	Sebastian Cabot
NURSE	Philippa Gill	JENNY	Mary Lynn

SYNOPSIS: *The scene is London. 1695. Act I. Scene 1. Valentine's lodgings. Morning. Scene 2. Foresight's house. The same day. Scene 3. The same. The same evening. Act II. Scene 1. Valentine's lodgings. The next morning. Scene 2. Foresight's house. Later in the day.*

Director: John Gielgud.

JOHN GIELGUD AND CO. followed their excellent display of *The Importance Of Being Earnest* with, if not an equally excellent production of a shortened version of the Congreve comedy, at least what in major part was a very good one. That English actors are admirably adapted to such artificial comedy is hardly remarkable and is much like saying that American actors are admirably adapted to comedies like *The Fall-Guy* and *Is Zat So?* Or that Russian actors are thoroughly at home in Chekhov, German in Hauptmann, Austrian in Schnitzler, and Chinese in Kao-Tsi-ch'ing. When a critic puts such thoughts down on paper, it simply means that he is hopefully marking time until something a little fresher, livelier and more piquant pops into his head. Meanwhile, he consoles himself that the statement, which has survived the years, is anyway perfectly safe and uncontradictable, which is something in a

day when one of the greatest of American indoor sports seems to be dispatching letters to critics arguing that they are first cousins to the jackass and might profitably be sent back to criticizing their sires.

The next step in the critic's procedure, if he hasn't too early a deadline, is to worry out a more or less novel reason why the English actors are so aptly fitted for the kind of comedy in question. Having several times before written that it is because they themselves are often personally of an artificial identity with the characters and hence suited naturally to their portrayal, he can not well repeat himself, because there is nothing his readers like better than to detect such repetitions and to argue from them that he is just where he was years ago and should be retired for arrested development. Having also observed a number of times that it is because the British actors articulate so precisely, are possessed of the appropriate brittle personalities, and are physically remote from the normal masculine biological realism (*Love For Love* was in one period played by an all-female cast), he appreciates that that will not do either. True as it may be, it is stale, and the primary business of readable criticism is to eschew the stale, or at least so ingeniously to garb it in new habiliments that it will not seem so. Anyone can write the truth but, when everybody already knows it, it takes some nose-scratching to present it in a fashion that will make the reader believe he is getting it for the first time. Shaw's trick has been defined as stating the obvious in terms of the scandalous. An even harder one is to state the obvious in terms of the seemingly profound.

I have sat here now for all of several hours trying to figure out a way to flimflam the reader by writing the same old thing in a manner to make him imagine that he is getting something piping hot off the griddle. But I am balked. I can't do it, at least not at the moment. I have thought of dressing up the reason why these English are better than any other at such artificial comedy in the argument that the latter is so wholly indigenous to their own land. But a second's reflection shows that that is silly, as this Congreve,

though born in England, was since infancy by training, education and process of thought Irish. It is also silly because the finest interpreter of the indigenously English Shakespeare was an Italian, the best interpreter of the indelibly Russian Tolstoi an Austrian, and the greatest interpreter of the French Dumas and Sardou, to say nothing of the German Sudermann, an actress born in a railway carriage on the road from Venice to Vigevano. I have also thought of toying with the observation that the reason may lie in the ingrained emotional chill of the Englishman which makes him a natural funnel for unemotional comedy. But though I have not seen it expressed in just that way before, it is a little too manifest and hence unworthy of the self-esteemed critical talents of your servant. And I have further meditated arguing that the reason may be that the affectation and insincerity of artificial comedy find their most convincing exponents in Englishmen who themselves seem to be constitutionally invested with affectation and insincerity, or at least the satisfactory semblance thereof. But though that may often appear to be true, it surely is not always true, since there have been English actors of a different chop who have been thoroughly acceptable in the same type of comedy.

So let us forget the whole matter, at any rate until I can think up something better.

It is rather late in the day to enter into any extensive discussion of the familiar, wittily bawdy and diverting, if here and there sometimes halting, Congreve play, or of its brilliant author. Though on a level far below his masterpiece, *The Way Of The World*, and materially inferior to his *The Old Bachelor*, and though it occupies third place in his canon of five plays, it nevertheless offers a comedy of manners which, despite its emphasis on plot, has contributed notably to the gallery of humorous character. Not humorous in the generally accepted sense, it should be reminded, but, in the author's words, humor which is "a singular and unavoidable manner of doing or saying anything, peculiar and natural to one character only, by which his speech and actions are distinguished from other characters."

Though the much finer *The Way Of The World* was on its initial production a failure both popularly and critically, *Love For Love* was a substantial success, which goes to show that the public and the majority of critics of one century are often much like those of another. Now as then, both usually share an affection for plot and are uncomfortable without it. Now as then, both have a disrelish for subtle shadings and prefer not the delicate but the more highly flavored. Both, too, still today with rare exception have a greater taste for direct humor than for sly wit, and have difficulty in detecting and appreciating genuine style when they come upon it. And both persist in their appetite for what John Palmer calls lightly running dialogue — “written, as it seems, joyously, *currente calamo*” — along with the “tumbling comedy” favored by Wycherley, and view with less regard dialogue of calmer distinction.

But if public and critics have not much changed, neither have playwrights, at least in one respect. Now as then, they still become wroth at adverse criticism. If such as Maxwell Anderson, Lillian Hellman and others presently give the critics a piece of their minds, so did Congreve when they failed to approve of one of his comedies. “Give me leave,” he testily wrote in his dedication of the play to Charles Montague, “to tell my illiterate critics, as an answer to their impotent objections, that they have found fault with that which has been pleasing to you. . . . They were not long since so kind to a very imperfect comedy of mine that I thought myself justly indebted to them in all my endeavors for an entertainment that might merit some little of that applause which they were so lavish of when I thought I had no title to it. But I find they are to be treated cheaply, and I have been at an unnecessary expense.”

The worst of it was that on this particular occasion — the play was *The Double Dealer* — the critics strangely happened to be right, as Congreve himself apparently came later to agree when he scissored the indictment from his literary records.

Though Gielgud’s Valentine, admirable in the earlier portions of the revival, tended to become a trifle listless in

the later, most of his support was in pretty trim, notably Cyril Ritchard, a capital Tattle; Pamela Brown, one of the best of the younger actresses England has lately sent across the waters, in the role of Angelica; and, as Miss Prue, Jessie Evans, a rowdy comédienne of the Joyce Redman cut. The settings by Rex Whistler, the costumes by Jeannetta Cochrane, and the stage lighting by William Conway added further to the satisfaction of the evening.

ICETIME OF 1948. MAY 28, 1947

An ice skating show, with tunes and lyrics by James Littlefield and John Fortis. Produced by Sonja Henie and Arthur W. Wirtz for 10 months' performances in the Center Theatre.

CAST

Freddie Trenkler, Joe Jackson, Jr., Skippy Baxter, Joan Hyldoft, the Bruises, Brandt sisters, James Caesar, Grace and Slagle, Paul Castle, Jimmie Sisk, Joe Shillen, Buck Pennington, Brandstetter and Berry, Corcoran and Kasper, Fritz Dietl, Claire Dalton, Lou Folds, Nola Fairbanks, Richard Craig, and Melba Welch.

Director: *Catherine Littlefield.*

EVERY YEAR at this time when I am called on to review one of the chronic ice skating shows, I think of a youth whom I first encountered as the janitor of a little summer theatre in New Jersey and whose principal duty seemed to be scraping the chewing gum off the bottoms of the seats. In the autumn of the same year he was drafted into the army and it was six months before I ran across him again. "How are things going?" I inquired. The look on his face was that of one whom the world had robbed of his proud birthright as he replied, "They've got me in a camp sweeping up cigarette butts; think of that for a man of *my* talents!"

Though noted far and wide for my modesty, I nevertheless feel much the same way when I am asked critically to sweep up these ice shows. I did not mind it so much at the start, but it has got to be a bit humiliating. In the first place, any office-boy could do the job, since the shows are always much alike and since, even at their best, which is seldom, they no more require any critical ability than a three-legged sack race. In the second place, once you say that the skaters are proficient, there is nothing left but the production numbers, which most often are exactly the same, except maybe for a little more snow paint on one of

the settings or a little less purple moonlight when the skaters appear in white costumes. And that hardly calls for the virtuosity of a Diderot. In the third place, and finally, it would be a simple matter for the office-boy to confect a perfectly acceptable review by copying what one had written about all the preceding shows. To wit, that the new show is interesting enough for, say, half an hour but that the endless skating thereafter gets to be very monotonous; that Freddie Trenkler, the clown, though he still does his same old act, is now and then amusing; that a little more imagination would help the show no end; and that, anyway, however anyone else may feel, the kids are sure to enjoy it enormously.

This last statement, however, begins to seem to me to be rather too condescending and to need some qualification. I have not the slightest doubt that the youngsters are greatly entertained by the first one or two or possibly even three ice skating shows which they are taken to see. But that they continue to be as greatly entertained by the constant duplications, I have the friendly consideration for them to disbelieve, that is, if they are anything like I was at their age. Ice shows were not in existence in that prehistoric period, but a fair equivalent in the form of roller skating shows was. And, while I accepted the pleasure hypothetically implicit in them for several years and was polite enough not to raise hell on subsequent occasions, I recall that I nevertheless always felt pretty glum when the old man announced I was to be privileged the rapture of attending another.

The theory that youngsters must hugely enjoy a show because their presence at it proves as much and because they do not when it is over kick their adult escorts in the ribs needs, I think, some overhauling. Aside from the unwonted politesse of the average lambkin when he is dressed up, which restrains him, albeit uncomfortably, from giving vent to his true feelings, the idea that he is not as impatient of repetition and monotony as older folk is unthinkable to anyone who has taken the trouble to observe his reactions in other relevant directions. He complains at

the daily breakfast oatmeal. He yowls at the imposed regular seven o'clock bed hour. He hates the daily demand that he wash behind the ears. He protests against the invariable Sabbath injunctions as to his week-day divertissements. He spills part of his detested daily lunch milk under the table. He rebels at length against Sunday School. He cries if he finds the same old orange occupying once again the toe of his Christmas stocking. And he is disconsolate in the face of dozens of other such repeated indignities. To imagine that this same darling suddenly acquires an enthusiastic admiration for the endlessly repeated and unchanging ice skating shows takes a great deal of imagining, and at this languid time of the year I am never up to it.

As for adults, the grind of suffering a long succession of the shows is something of a piece with the rapt enjoyment to be had in peering for two or three hours into a *Frigidaire* for a bottle of beer that isn't there. I appreciate that the box-office statistics seem to contradict me. The shows play to big crowds and make all kinds of money. But to argue that because of that fact the customers must naturally delight in them is to argue that, because the five-and-ten-cent stores do millions of dollars' worth of business, people prefer to smell at a dime paper rose instead of the real article. The principal and correlated reason why mobs of people go to the shows is that they are cheap, and a lot of people have to take what in the way of entertainment they can afford. Many of them make the best of it, as they make the best of it with a twenty-five cent hamburger when their mouths water for a *filet mignon*. And, having to take the inexpensive skating shows, they conveniently pretend to themselves that they are not so tiresome as they really are and, anyway, that, even if they are, they are a relief from the steady diet of inexpensive movies, which are more tiresome still.

In this latest of these specimens of refrigerated ennui the skaters may be said to be as expert as heretofore; Freddie Trenkler again scoots like mad around the rink and again brings himself up with a supposedly very comical abrupt stop, spraying the customers down front with ice flakes;

and the lines of girls and boys skate Rockette-wise, negotiate the usual pinwheel formations, and try for a laugh when one of the boys pretends to miss the end of the whirling line and frantically endeavors to catch up with it, or at least I take it for granted that he does, though I didn't unnecessarily hang around to make sure. Also repeating their domesticated performances are the twirling blonde Joan Hyldoft, the knockabout team who call themselves the Bruises, the gliding Brandt sisters, and the all familiar rest. Only Joe Jackson, Jr., may be said in a manner to introduce a new note with his old imitation of the older vaudeville act of his late pater.

At this point, I may state that I dislike to boast, but my critical influence seems to be enormous. Every year, following my pronouncement that these shows are as dull as yesterday's razor blades and are endless copies of glaciated mediocrity, like frozen corn starch masquerading as French ice cream, they promptly collapse to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars, net profit. This has been going on now for at least seven or eight seasons and they indicate no signs of letting up on my acumen and the resulting revenue. What it all probably goes to prove is that, while one's opinion of what constitutes theatrical art may be perfectly sound and enthusiastically endorsed by scholars who have not gone near the theatre since Ada Rehan died, it is a considerable mistake to imagine that one's opinion of what constitutes entertainment is of any interest to anyone but one's self.

That, however, is nothing I have just discovered. I first began to appreciate it shortly after I started in this business of criticism, which was back in the age when you could still get a Martini for fifteen cents, with a free lunch of hard-boiled eggs, Virginia ham, bacon rolls, fish balls, Cheddar cheese, small hot sausages, smoked herring, lobster salad, potato chips, pretzels, celery, olives, and conciliatory cloves thrown in. It was then and that early that I reviewed a show called *The Road To Yesterday* and sternly promulgated the decree that not only did it default on all those qualities favored by the higher drama criticism but

that you could knock me over with *The Red Feather* if it contained even the germ of the kind of entertainment favored by the public. The public, however, was apparently either too busy at the moment or too careless properly to digest my sagacity and embarrassed me profoundly by pouring itself in droves into the theatre where the play was showing and having itself a grand time at it. I promptly learned my lesson and have forgotten it since only at rare intervals, to my sorrow. I now stick to criticism instead of to sticking out my neck. If I am not entertained by a bad play or show, I content myself with telling why personally I think it is bad, and if the public finds it nevertheless entertaining I simply take private refuge in Commodore Vanderbilt's old remark and, at least in print, shut ma mouf.

It is thus that the circumstance that countless people have disobeyed my critical injunctions as to the ice skating shows and have flocked to them and even ostensibly enjoyed themselves at them does not in any way discommode me. Nevertheless, the public can not stop me from wondering how and why the shows continue to do such disgustingly big business year in and year out. It must be, as I have previously guessed, the relatively low admission charges. If a fellow wishes to take his girl to a Broadway musical show like *Annie Get Your Gun*, a pair of good orchestra seats, if he can get them at the box-office, which is very doubtful, cost him thirteen dollars and twenty cents. A pair for a musical show like this *Icetime Of 1948* on the other hand cost him only four dollars and eighty cents. The Center Theatre is a handsomer one than the Imperial, where *Annie* is playing; the surroundings are quite as gay; the "show air" is equally present; and the evening-out feeling is also there. It is, accordingly, a desirable bargain to anyone willing to accept, for the seventh or eighth time, a waltzing couple on skates as a substitute for Ethel Merman off them, Littlefield and Fortis tunes for Irving Berlin's, Edward Gilbert's and Bruno Main's penny postcard scenery for Jo Mielziner's, and the number in which a girl falls asleep under a spangled tree and dreams rapturously of a

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bad vaudeville act for anything at all. But as for me, when it comes to entertainment, I fear that I can find considerably less in a female skater who skates in unison with another behind a scrim mirror, or in a male who squats and kicks out his legs Russian-fashion, or even in fifty of both sexes who execute the 1895 pinwheel number than, like my friend Somerset Maugham in another direction, in a glass of good, cold lager.

LOUISIANA LADY. JUNE 2, 1947

A musical comedy with book by Isaac Green, Jr., and Eugene Berton, music and lyrics by Monte Carlo and Alma Sanders. Produced by Hall Shelton for 4 performances in the Century Theatre.

PROGRAM

EL GATO	Ray Jacquemot	MADAME CORDAY	Monica Moore
JOE	Patrick Meaney	PIERRE	Ken Bond
MICHEL	Lou Wills, Jr.	MARQUETTE	Robert Kimberly
SARAH	Tina Prescott	MERLUCHE	George Baxter
CORRINE	Ann Lay	ALPHONSE	Charles Judels
GERMAINE	Patti Hall	CELESTE	Bertha Powell
ANNETTE	Angela Carabella	A DRUNK	George Roberts
SUZANNE	Patti Kingsley	HOSKINS	Berton Davis
MARIE-LOUISE	Edith Fellows	JANET	Francis Keyes
CHARLEY	Howard Blaine	GOLONDRINA	Victoria Cordova
CHRISTOPHE	William Downes	CHICO	Michael Landau
GEORGE	Ameil Brown	GASTON	Bert Wilcox
HUGO	Lee Kerry	MRS. DANFORTH	Ann Viola
GENEVIEVE	Isabella Wilson	GEORGETTE	Isabella Wilson

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *A levee in New Orleans. April 1830.* Scene 2. *A study in Miss Browne's Finishing School. Sunday afternoon.* Scene 3. *The parlor of the Casino Deluxe of Mme. Corday. The following evening.* Scene 4. *A garden.* Scene 5. *The parlor. A few minutes later.* Act II. Scene 1. *The parlor. Immediately following.* Scene 2. *A street.* Scene 3. *The Cucacheena Café.* Scene 4. *Canal street.* Scene 5. *The gaming room. One hour later.* Scene 6. *The garden.*

Director: Edgar MacGregor.

TWENTY YEARS AGO Samuel Shipman and Kenneth Perkins wrote and produced a dreary pornographic play called *Creoles*, which promptly failed. Last year an equally dreary musical show called *In Gay New Orleans* while being tried out in Boston failed and closed even more promptly. Operating inscrutably, Mr. Shelton bought the latter's scenery and costumes, borrowed the *Creoles* script and hired a pair of mechanics to adapt it to the scenery and costumes in lieu of the original book, and called

the concoction *Louisiana Lady*, which now failed more promptly still.

Items contributive to the immediate storehouse dispatch:

1. Plot: The moldering one about the innocent little maiden who returns to what she believes is her respectable old family home and finds herself instead in a bordello, in this instance presided over by her mother who has fallen into the power of a blackmailing knave.
2. Comedy: The kind which consists in the dialect comedian's cracking his tongue against the roof of his mouth to indicate the sound of a pulled champagne cork, along with his pronunciation of the word "niece" as "sneeze."
3. Music: The derivative kind which is familiar to the point of impertinence.
4. Lyrics: "I Want To Live, I Want To Love," "The Night Was All To Blame," "When You Are Close To Me," "No One Cares For Dreams," and "It's Mardi Gras!"
5. Choreography: The kind in which the male dancers every few minutes hoist the female dancers into the air.
6. Performance: The species which brings the singing ladies and gentlemen to stand close to the footlights and blink their eyes winningly at the audience, and subsequently to make their exits with either a merry laugh or an outraged hauteur.
7. Direction: The brand which causes the lovers when they quarrel to plump themselves down at opposite ends of a table, to avert their faces from each other, and irritably to tap their feet.

 OPEN HOUSE. JUNE 3, 1947

A comedy by Harry Young. Produced by Rex Carlton for 7 performances in the Cort Theatre.

PROGRAM

MRS. BARRETT	Mary Boland	BOB	Del Hughes
GLENN STEWART	John Harvey	JENNIE	Dulcie Cooper
LEE ELKINS	Don Gibson	LETTER CARRIER	Harold Grau
OLIVIA COREY	Augusta Roeland	UNCLE WATTERSON	Curtis Cooksey
EXPRESSMAN	Sammy Schwartz	CHIEF	Ben Loughlin
MRS. COREY	Ann Dere	POLICEMAN	Dennis Bohan
FLO ELKINS	Joyce Mathews	MR. WESTCOTT	William David
MIKE	Dave Tyrrell	PHOTOGRAPHER	Forest Taylor, Jr.
JOE	Steven Gethers	MR. PILSUDSKI	Will Kuluva

SYNOPSIS: The action takes place in the living-room of Mrs. Barrett's home in a small industrial city in the East. Act I. Late one summer afternoon. Act II. Early evening. One week later. Act III. 11 a.m. the following day.

Time: The present.

Director: Coby Ruskin.

IT IS A SAFE BET that the Rex Carlton who produced the gobbler is now going about proclaiming that the theatre is such a gamble that, compared with it, investing in New Jersey gold mines or even in the shell game is the zenith of wisdom. The plaint is a familiar one. Let some such tyro ambitiously put on something so bad that the stagehands have to hold their noses and he is nevertheless firmly convinced that, if the public does not flock to it, the fault is not his own but that of some mysterious and inscrutable element connected with the show business in general.

If a man were to try to sell freezess coolers and found that nobody would buy them, he would hardly allege that you never can tell about the icebox business. If he were to hawk wine glasses without bottoms and no purchasers showed up, he would not argue that it seemed to indicate that a man was a fool to go into the wine glass business. But if he puts on a play just as defective and cannot sell it,

he is positive that the state of affairs is solely attributable to the fact that no one can guess what the theatre public will like. There have been countless such profound philosophers in the theatre's history and their number shows no signs of diminishing. The theatre is probably no more a gamble than many other businesses. But you can not play it and win if you haven't the equipment for it any more than you can win in the book publishing business if you can't read, despite some seeming evidence to the contrary. Consider the article which this Carlton had sublime faith in as a money-maker and which he hoped the public would cherish.

The plot treated once again of the housing shortage, a topic that had already brought grim failure to all but one of the plays that dealt with it, and the one exception made little more than chicken-feed. In this case, the story was of a widow in need of funds who finds herself burdened with a large, expensive house. Though the uppish neighborhood frowns on the renting of rooms to outsiders, she takes in a pair of young men whom she has casually met on a bus, who can not find a place to live in, and whose rent money will come in handy. When the neighborhood raises objections, the newcomers profess to be relatives and all seems to be resolved satisfactorily until various questionable friends of the twain put in an appearance. The upshot is a police raid on the house in the belief that it is one of ill repute, with the chief of the protesting female neighbors loaded into the wagon with everyone else. The last act, as last acts have a way of doing in bad plays if not always in life, straightens everything out but the investment of Mr. Carlton and his backers.

In a preceding play called *Tenting Tonight*, the plot similarly had to do with a woman who met the housing shortage by taking in several young men who similarly pretended, when trouble came, to be relatives. Also, when things appeared again to be running smoothly, a number of their shady friends similarly showed up and similarly caused the chief of the protesting characters to conclude that the house was one of dubious morals. *Tenting To-*

night was duly and unanimously belted by the reviewers, closed after a short engagement, and lost its all.

To continue the auditing. Harry Young, the author of Mr. Carlton's anticipated mint, may not, for all one knows, be a radio or movie writer but he writes like one. His dramatic-literary ability is eminently more suited to air programs and the films than to the stage. His humor is the kind that calls for a radio studio claque for appreciation, and his idea of dramatic line and situation the sort that, with a wholesale dose of the psychopathology presently admired by Hollywood injected into it, should make a passable Grade-Z picture.

Mr. Carlton doubtless further imagined that by casting Mary Boland in the leading role he would have a marquee name that would rope in the customers. Miss Boland is an able and amusing comédienne and did as well as almost anyone else could possibly have done. But, with all her virtues, she is not an audience draw on her own, as was indicated by the quick collapse of *The Greatest Of These*, in which she had appeared only a few months before. Miss Boland, like almost any other actress, big or not so big, needs a good, or at least a poor but popularly magnetic, play to get people in to see her. And this *Open House* would scarcely have got them in even were she to have appeared in it along with Katharine Cornell, Sonja Henie, and Jumbo. Mr. Carlton, when and if he grows up in the theatre, will begin to realize such things. Meanwhile, he should have reflected that an actor or actress, however talented, can no more bring in the money with a play that no one wants to see than a poker player, however expert, can rake in the chips with a single king or queen. He should have reflected, in short, on various such later day catastrophes. There was Tallulah Bankhead, for example, and *The Eagle Has Two Heads*, which could not have turned a profit even had Tallulah done a strip-tease and chased Father Divine up and down the aisles, with Gypsy Rose Lee in hot pursuit. There was Spencer Tracy and *The Rugged Path*, who for all his potential following could not persuade the trade to come in. There was, in another di-

rection, even the great Bobby Clark Himself who could not do much, for all his popularity, with *The Would-Be Gentleman*. There was, too, Mr. Carlton should have meditated, James Mason and *Bathsheba*, which could not draw even the actor's screen worshippers. And there were Mady Christians and *Message For Margaret*, Billie Burke and *Mrs. January And Mr. Ex*, Pauline Lord and *Sleep My Pretty One*, Ethel Barrymore and *Embezzled Heaven*, and many others.

The theatre, in conclusion, will always be not only a gamble but a certain loss to men who do not approach it with at least the measure of caution with which they approach a new barber or a new girl. Those who have thus approached it and who have added to caution some experience and sagacity have got pretty rich from it, as the records from Palmer and Daly to the Klaw and Erlanger syndicate and Belasco and from Frohman, Savage, *et al.*, to a number of the producers today attest. There are even outsiders of some wit and sapience who have not found it to be such a dangerous investment: Howard Cullman, the tobacco tycoon, for one, whose shrewd guessing has picked three or four winners for every loser and who has derived goodly profits from putting his money into the box-office kind of plays and even the more risky musical shows.

Mr. Carlton in the future should consult either a good fortune-teller or someone like Rodgers and Hammerstein.

NO EXIT. JUNE 9, 1947

A revival of the play by Jean-Paul Sartre. Produced by the On Stage group for 38 performances in the Cherry Lane Theatre.

PROGRAM

VALET
GARCIN

Glen Alvey | ESTELLE
Alexis Solomos | INEZ

Sally Sigler
Brenda Ericson

Scene: A living-room in Second Empire style.

Director: Frank Corsaro.

THE PERSISTING PASSION of those mental giants who hold that drama is grossly unendurable save it be packed with profound thought continues to be the Frenchman, Sartre. Two specimens of his admired deep thinking had thus far been revealed to the local stage: this revived *No Exit* (*Huis Clos*) and *The Flies* (*Les Mouches*). What, precisely, are they like?

No Exit shows us three persons condemned to spend an eternity in Hell in one another's close company. The three are a cowardly collaborationist in the last war, a female infanticide of loose sexual morals, and a distaff pervert. The action brings out the psychic torture and despair of the trio. The theme is stated in the line, "Hell is other people." Aside from the facts that the tone and method of the play were long ago anticipated by the German Wedekind; that the dramatic scheme was subsequently utilized in a short Grand Guignol psychological play wherein three similarly ill-assorted people were locked in a dark cellar and, as in the Sartre exhibit, were overcome by the hopelessness of their plight; and that a more imaginative Frenchman might have thought of the greater and crueler irony of three extremely witty and too charming people faced with the boredom and misery of spending an eternity together — aside from such points, let us engage the quality of the author's touted cerebral luxuriance.

That the play is partly filagreed with Existentialism, the pseudo-philosophical theory of human conduct of which Sartre is the shogun, has been sufficiently suggested in the critical prints. That this Existentialism, which gives into the individual's keeping his own freedom and destiny and denies the power over him of the various old social, national, and upper-story gods, is an obvious brew of Kierkegaard and Heidegger decorated with a Left Bank cherry is also sufficiently appreciated. And that, when the boozy effect of the tippie wears off, it is seen to be little more than a strident recitation of the old maxim, "Man is the master of his own soul," embroidered with the platform gestures of Nietzsche, Robert Ingersoll and Isadora Duncan, is almost as apparent. So much for that.

We come to the afflatus of the play as more directly expressed. Inquiring into the real motives for certain human behavior, Sartre argues that, though a man may find good reasons for having done a thing, "fear and hatred and all the dirty little instincts one keeps dark" may also have been motives. As to the doctrine that "a man is what he wills himself to be," he retorts, "It is what one does, and nothing else, that shows the stuff one is made of." And as to death, his philosophy is "One always dies too soon, or too late. And yet one's whole life is complete at that moment, with a line drawn neatly under it, ready for the summing up. You are your life, and nothing else." These pearls of wisdom constitute the sum total of the play's intellectual content. One and all are platitudes, familiar from long restatement over the centuries, and no better, if as well, put than when the late lamented Ed Howe, the sage of Kansas' Potato Hill, wrote them to fill out the bottoms of his four-sheet monthly newspaper's columns. And as to the theme, "Hell is other people," that may be recalled from Gogol's (1809-1852) "Hell is not oneself but others."

There you have a fair distillation of the rich, fresh mentality of a play which elsewhere occupies itself with such brainy topics as the absence of tooth-brushes and bathroom facilities in the lower regions, with the hideousness of old-

fashioned wine-red and green sofas, with a woman's lost feeling if she hasn't a vanity mirror, and with red faces that resemble tomatoes.

The Flies, considerably the better of the two plays, is still another retelling of the Orestes-Electra legend couched in modern phraseology and contains what is described as Sartre's prescription for the deadly psychological malaise of such mortals as figure in *No Exit*. In the prescription the playwright's admirers detect an intellectual puissance even greater than that demonstrated in the latter play.

Sartre's prodigiously original brain exercise in this case results in the philosophy that "once freedom lights its beacon in a man's heart, the gods are powerless against him." In other words, that when a man, having rid himself of the conventional sense of guilt and qualm, appreciates to the full that freedom is his birthright, the old forces of social and religious intimidation become no longer operative. And, as his fellow Existentialist and spokesman, Madame de Beauvoir, expands it, "The true use of freedom is to help others to freedom. In helping others Orestes helps himself as well, because in this way he achieves the triumph of individual freedom. People often do not accept their freedom because they are afraid." The exact nature of the virginal profundity inherent in the philosophy escapes this moron. He seems to recall much the same thing years ago in the writings of the German-Czech Franz Kafka, notably in *The Castle*, etc., to say nothing of in those of the Kierkegaard aforesaid. Sartre's artifice is simply to state very positively, and thus impress those who react most readily to dogmatic expression, what his predecessors stated more moderately. The essence of the philosophy is, furthermore, scarcely startling. There were sufficient traces of it in Eckhart, Engels, Max Nordau, and many others long since gone. "He who is free and knows it knows no gods," wrote one of Sartre's famous fellow-countrymen more than three centuries ago. "Man is man only by his refusal to be passive," says Sartre. "Do not say I would, but say I will, that it may now be so," said Eckhart more than six centuries ago.

That such and similar worn ideas should be regarded as noteworthy mental achievements is, nevertheless, not surprising. Even at their most familiar and obvious they are tablets from the mount in comparison with much of what passes for mentality in the drama of Broadway. After a starvation diet, even a slightly senescent pork chop seems pretty wonderful. We should not forget that Ibsen shook the claptrap reasoning of the English-speaking stage off its feet with ideas which, while strange to the theatre, were not materially above the intellectual level of a popular novelist. Nor should we forget that Shaw subsequently shook Ibsen off his feet in turn by heaving himself into the latter's domain and at the very outset staggering audiences far and wide with, for the first time from a stage, a facile parroting of doctrines culled from Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Marx.

Sartre, of course, is no remotest, faintest Ibsen or Shaw, but he seems to be onto the trick of rubbing one platitude against another and producing what the credulous see as brilliant sparks.

 LAURA. JUNE 26, 1947

A mystery play by Vera Caspary and George Sklar based on the former's novel of the same name. Produced by H. Clay Blaney in association with S. P. and R. P. Steckler for 45 performances in the Cort Theatre.

PROGRAM

MARK MCPHERSON	<i>Hugh Marlowe</i>	BESSIE CLARY	<i>Grania O'Malley</i>
DANNY DORGAN	<i>Tom Walsh</i>	MRS. DORGAN	<i>Kay MacDonald</i>
WALDO LYDECKER	<i>Otto Kruger</i>	A GIRL	<i>K. T. Stevens</i>
SHELBY CARPENTER		OLSEN	<i>Walter Riemer</i>
	<i>Tom Rutherford</i>		

SYNOPSIS: *The setting is the living-room of Laura Hunt's apartment in New York City. Act I. An evening in August. Act II. The next morning. Act III. That night.*

Director: *Clarence Derwent.*

SHORTLY BEFORE the play opened I came across a short story about a young Spanish girl of high birth who fell in love with a coachman. I had not got far into it before I encountered this further choice cliché: "A lady came up to me with outstretched hands and a bright smile on her lips. To the best of my knowledge, I had never seen her before in my life." This was quickly followed by another: "She was a fine figure of a woman, and I could well believe that in youth she had been beautiful." Presently came still another, describing the young Spanish girl: "She was slim . . . with a red mouth and dazzling white teeth. The fire in her black eyes, the warmth of her smile, the seductiveness of her movements suggested so much passion," etc. Then another still: "A good many men, rich or noble and sometimes both, had asked Dona Pilar's hand in marriage, but notwithstanding her mother's remonstrances she had refused them." Then yet another: "It was decided Pilar should be sent away to the country and kept there until she had recovered from her infatuation." And such others as "Nothing that anyone could say would induce her to

forsake the man she loved"; "The Duchess made a final appeal to her daughter. In vain"; "I told Pilar that she should get nothing from me. They can starve for all I care"; and "The Countess gave him a smile that would have turned the head of anyone who was not madly in love already." And more.

Since the author's name, following *The New Yorker's* policy, did not appear until the end of the story, I turned the pages to see who he could possibly be, having previously concluded that he must be some hack whose manuscript had been bought long since in an off moment and which was now dug out of the drawer for use in the dead summer period when magazines, editors appreciate, are used mainly as table coasters for gin rickey glasses. It was, accordingly, something of a shock to discover that the writer was not the expected nonentity but none other than the customarily original and witty W. S. Maugham.

It was, however, no slightest shock to discover that the authors of this *Laura*, like the great majority of their kind, were given wholesale to the clichés of the standard mystery play. Let such evolve a plot of some interest, as in this case, and they nevertheless are pretty certain to dull it out of interest with repetitions of the routine characters, lines and stage business common to the dramaturgical species. Duly to be anticipated, for example, is the detective who will seize up the telephone on a call from Headquarters and monosyllabically ejaculate a startled "What? Where?," thus hypothetically agonizing the curiosity of the audience as to some new suspect. Duly to be expected is the business involving the villain's drawing of a gun to shoot the heroine, the sound of a shot, the revelation that it was fired not by the villain but by the detective warily concealed without, and the villain's collapse with a bullet in his arm. The comedy-relief household maid, the arbitrary periodic dousing of the lights, the vase on the mantelpiece in which something or other has been hidden, and in sufficient instances the walking-stick containing a sword, dagger, or revolver may similarly be looked forward to. Often, also, one may anticipate the man-of-the-world character, attired in

the ultimate cry and a fellow of pusillanimous charm, who will be the repository of what the authors regard as a modish and biting wit, which will take such contours as defining this or that as the last refuge of a scoundrel and that or this as the final essence of barbarism. The phonograph will be economically resorted to to supply anomalous incidental music to a tense scene; thrown in will be tokens of the authors' culture in the form of allusions to ceramics, Shostakovitch, and the contemporary French novelists; and at least one scene will reveal the heroine in a silk pajama outfit so elaborate that it will take the audience all of ten minutes to get its mind back on the play again.

The story here is the murder of one woman in the belief that she is another and the disclosure that the culprit is a man who once sought to possess her, whose sexual impotence interfered with the realization of his passion, and who has done away with her to prevent any other man from achieving her. In more imaginative hands it might conceivably have been made into a taut and holding twitcher. But in these it has become simply another garrulous and stenciled failure. Nor did the direction and acting relieve its torpidity.

RIP VAN WINKLE. JULY 15, 1947

A revival of the play made from Washington Irving's story by Dion Boucicault, revised by Herbert Berghof, with incidental music by André Singer. Produced by the Company of Twelve for 15 performances in the City Center Theatre.

PROGRAM

GRETCHEN	<i>Grace Coppin</i>	RIP VAN WINKLE	<i>Philip Bourneuf</i>
MINNIE	<i>Jimsey Somers</i>	JACOB STEIN	<i>Jack Bittner</i>
NICK VEDDER	<i>Martin Wolfson</i>	TOWN CRIER	<i>Del Hughes</i>
DERRICK VAN BEEKMAN		SETH	<i>Jack Bittner</i>
	<i>Byron McGrath</i>	KATIE	<i>Haila Stoddard</i>
PETER	<i>Edwin Bruce</i>	MINNIE (grown up)	<i>Frances Reid</i>
COCKLES	<i>Jack Manning</i>	PETER (grown up)	<i>Arthur Franz</i>

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The Village of Falling Waters, at the foot of the Catskill Mountains.* Scene 2. *Inside Rip's house, that night.* Scene 3. *A path in the Catskills, later the same night.* Scene 4. *High up in the Catskills, later still.* Act II. Scene 1. *High up in the Catskills, early morning.* Scene 2. *The path in the Catskills.* Scene 3. *The Village of Falling Waters.*

Director: *Herbert Berghof.*

THE POSSE of ambitious players who optimistically installed themselves in the municipal dramatic hot-spot as a repertory project opened up shop with a revised version of Joseph Jefferson's famous meal-ticket, and with one Bourneuf in Joe's old role. I confess that I approached the occasion full of prejudice. Since this is obviously a shameful condition in any critic, I ask the reader either to stop reading at this point or, if he finds himself unable to resist the allure of my prose, to proceed at his own risk and doubtless to his own annoyance.

Rip is one of the most engaging of American legends and whatever the version or whoever the actor is bound to exercise at least a measure of its spell over an auditor. And here once again, despite miserable staging and direction, it did so. But while in this projection it may have been ac-

cepted with some favor by members of the more recent generation it failed to enchant this older boy as it did in those distant days when Joe was in command of it.

It isn't that Jefferson was any giant as an actor. Far from it. He was, in fact, rather an ordinary one, one whose range was notoriously limited and whose eminence was predicated largely on this single role. His performance as Bob Acres in *The Rivals*, his second most popular role, was a negligible one. But as Rip he triumphed for almost half a century and anyone who saw him can not see any other actor in the part without wincing. There have been actors like that, actors whose personality, voice and manner, whatever the volume of their talents, have so stamped certain roles that the latter become forevermore part and parcel of them and in which subsequent actors seem to be gross intruders. James A. Herne in *Shore Acres*, William Gillette in *Sherlock Holmes*, and Kyrle Bellew in *Raffles* so closely identified the parts with themselves that, if one were to view any other actor, however able, in them, one would be sorely disquieted. And so, too, was it in the instances of James O'Neill and *Monte Cristo*, Denman Thompson and *The Old Homestead*, David Warfield and *The Music Master*, and George M. Cohan and any of his plays.

It was thus that, watching Bourneuf in Jefferson's shoes, I condoned my prejudice by recalling Hazlitt's words: "No wise man can have a contempt for the prejudices of others; and he should even stand in a certain awe of his own, as if they were aged parents or monitors. They may in the end prove wiser than he." Be that as it may, Bourneuf simply was not on that stage so far as I was concerned. The years swept back their curtain and, for me, it was Joe who was giving his old, grand performance in my memory. There, as a youngster, I saw him again in all his long, lean loveliness and with all that odd, cajoling croak in his voice. There I saw him making off from his testy wife like a household dog half-sad to be driven from surroundings that, though intolerable, yet remained home. There I saw him waking from his long sleep in clothes absurdly tat-

tered, raising himself with those familiar Jeffersonian rheumatic calisthenics to his crooked height and squinting in disbelief at the Hudson gleaming below him. And there still I saw him, bewhiskered and betalcumed like some starved Dutch Edmond Dantes, stumbling back to his changed fireside. What Bourneuf was like all this while, I do not know and do not much care to know. He may have been a good Rip or a poor one. Let the younger generation decide for themselves. But my prejudice played another Rip in his stead. I wasn't a critic that evening; I was the boy who had seen Joe Jefferson a dozen or more times in bygone Cleveland and Philadelphia, and that boy was not to be disturbed for a minute by anyone else in Joe's place.

I am not, I think, derogating unduly the actor who hoped to wean my recollection and attention from Joe. In the years since Joe passed from the world, I have seen other actors in the role and they have been no more successful at the job.

There were some added things I missed in the production. All the modern scenic improvements could not make up for that wonderful old scene in the Catskills — at least it seemed wonderful then — with the stage crammed with great trees and such a wealth of carpenter work on the mound on which Rip slept as under today's prices would bankrupt half the producers on Broadway. Maybe my imagination is not what it used to be, but I also missed the warming old Dutch atmosphere that hovered over the stage in the early and late scenes. And I most certainly missed that thrilling old spectacle of the brown dwarfs with the thunder of their bowling balls so loud and detonating that it used to knock me out of my seat onto my best matinée knickerbockers.

If you think all this is just the sentimental maundering of a dodo, you are, I may inform you, in error. There are some shows and some actors that never were intended for adult criticism anyway, and *Rip* and Jefferson were among them. They were the stuffs of childish diversion and youthful wonder and as such they simply remain in any man worth his salt. Let any of my younger friends who saw the

show for the first time solemnly assert that Bourneuf was Rip to the life and let them have their way and be damned. Let any such squirts say that Jefferson could not possibly have been better and that anyone who says he was is just living foolishly and forlornly in the past and let them have their way and be double-damned. They weren't in Carcassonne. But we older fellows were and, whether in the peanut gallery or down in the orchestra, it was and it remains Joe for us. We are a lot of old sentimentalists? Twenty-three, skidoo! We are a lot of old fogys? You're off your trolley! We are pathetic worshippers of the past? Oh, you kid! We are just a lot of dodderers who don't know what we're talking about? Skedaddle!

P.S. Judging from report, Bourneuf must have been pretty bad, since the show was forced to close after less than two weeks' performances, and the company's repertory project with it.

 THE MAGIC TOUCH. SEPTEMBER 3, 1947

A comedy by Charles Raddock and Charles Sherman. Produced by John Morris Chanin for 12 performances in the International Theatre.

PROGRAM

CATHY TURNER	Sara Anderson	FLOSSIE CLAYPOOL	Hope Emerson
JEFF TURNER	William Terry	LARRY MASTERS	
EDDIE MITCHELL	Sid Melton		Carleton Carpenter
J. L. THOMPSON	Howard Smith	WILBUR GRIGSBY	Norman Tokar
AMY THOMPSON	Frances Comstock	KEN WHITE	Burke McHugh
BAKER	Le Roi Operti		

SYNOPSIS: The entire action of the play takes place today, in the modest little New York apartment of the Turners. Act I. Early autumn. Dinner hour. Act II. A week later. Afternoon. Act III. An afternoon of the following month.

Director: Herman Rotsten.

IN THE CASE of plays like this, it is the custom of many of the reviewers puzzledly to wrinkle their brows and to speculate why the producers ever saw fit to put them on. The furrowing and speculating always impress me as being an unnecessary waste of time and effort. The producers, as Mr. John Morris Chanin in this instance, put them on because they like them.

Such bad plays are produced for the same reasons that some men marry women who everyone else knows will at the very least steal the change out of their trousers' pockets, and that the men who do not marry them occupy themselves instead in throwing away their money on fixed prize fights, ten cent sex stories in the guise of three dollar historical novels, filet of flounder Marguery, and other such whimsical sure-things. They are produced, in short, because their sponsors do not know any better, which information should earn me the undying gratitude of those of my colleagues who up to now have been frantically scratch-

ing their brains for the explanation and have been despairful at ever finding the answer.

The Magic Touch is the kind of play and performance which beetleheads every once in a while loftily point to as indicating the superiority of the moving pictures to the theatre. That there may be some movies very much better than such a play I do not doubt, since if there are not, the movies would be just where the theatre would be if there weren't plays very much better. The movie champions, however, seem to be the sort of intellects that pick not the best plays to compare with the best pictures but the worst, which is much like saying that the food at the Colony is not anywhere nearly so good as that in the Metro-Goldwyn commissary because one of the rolls was found to be stale.

But do not imagine for a moment that I am defending anything like *The Magic Touch* at the expense of the films. If the films seem to me to be unworthy of my attention, *The Magic Touch* is unworthy not only of my attention but of that of everyone else, including those who deem the films worthy of theirs. Without a germ of merit in any department, the thing deals with a young New York married pair who are living on a diminutive amount of money and with a publisher who gets the idea that a book describing the way they succeed in doing so would make a prodigious amount. It is true that ideas not materially more sensational have intermittently been the foundations of best-sellers. But it is nevertheless a safe guess that any book made up of such characters as figure in the Messrs. Raddock's and Sherman's contraption, even if they lived happily on a nickel a week, would soon find its way to the remainder counters.

The staging of the script suggested that a director was dismissed in favor of a wind machine, and the acting tumult suggested that the wind machine was of cyclone calibre.

I GOTTA GET OUT. SEPTEMBER 25, 1947

A comedy by Joseph Fields and Ben Sher. Produced by Herbert H. Harris and Lester Meyer for 4 performances in the Cort Theatre.

PROGRAM

SWIFTY	Reed Brown, Jr.	CONSTANTIN	Richard Shankland
BERNIE	David Burns	STODDARD	Harry K. Smith
RADTKE	Hal Neiman	ANGIE	Kenneth Forbes
TIMMIE	John Conway	DR. FLUGELMAN	
FRANCES	Eileen Larson		E. A. Krumschmidt
GUSSIE	Peggy Maley	JAKE	Don Grusso
MARY	Peggy Van Vleet	STEVE	Griff Evans
MRS. CLARK	Edith Meiser	HOGAN	Mickey Cochran
A TAXICAB DRIVER	Ralph Smiley	BRODERICK	Dan Evans
LARRY	Ted Erwin	JERRY	Ralph Simone
DR. PERRIN	Edwin Whitner	TOM HILL	Donald Foster

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *A Bookmaker's poolroom, above a stable. Late afternoon.* Scene 2. *The kitchen of Mrs. Clark's home in Nassau, Long Island. The next morning.* Act II. *Belmont Park. Early afternoon.* Act III. *The kitchen of Mrs. Clark's home. A few hours later.*

Time: *The present.*

Place: *Greater New York.*

Director: *Joseph Fields.*

AMONG THE PONDEROUS number of American plays dealing with sports of various kinds, there have been very few that have been respectably entertaining. Of the many baseball plays, the only one, aside from a scene or two in *Elmer The Great*, which contained any amusement was the short *The Bull Pen*, and that owed its humor to the same matchless Ring Lardner. Of the football plays, only George Ade's *The College Widow* has counted. The rest were mainly trash of the *Strongheart* sort. Plays about track athletics — Paul Armstrong and Elliott Nugent confected specimens — have been dismal, and so have plays about tennis like *Fast Service*. Rowing has produced only rubbish like *Brown of Harvard*, and prize fighting but one diverting ex-

hibit, *Is Zat So?* Golf has not attracted our stagewriters, though I recall one play years ago — Frank Craven's *The Nineteenth Hole* — that was something rather sinister. In the case of horse racing, the record is not materially better and indicates additionally that all sports are generally a lot better off out of doors. Of the numerous racing plays, Henry Blossom's *Checkers* was moderately amusing and the more recent *Three Men On A Horse* had its fairly humorous moments. But from the far-away years of *In Old Kentucky*, *Blue Grass* and *The Whip* through those of *Wildfire* and down to the later of *The Odds On Mrs. Oakley* and *Horse Fever* the entries have been chiefly selling-platers, with spavin. There is nothing in Mr. Fields' and Mr. Sher's contribution to alter the glum picture. Though the authors employ enough actors depicting racetrack and associated types to overflow a theatre stage and though all of them comport themselves with a zeal more appropriately hoped for in the horses, the show goes lame before the first act is half over.

In the manipulation of plot, involving a trio of bookies, the playwrights have fallen back on the old troubled concern of the sweet young girl for her racetrack boy friend, which had served the aforesaid *Checkers* on its opening exactly forty-four years and three days before. Mixed with this is the business of the shady lot of characters who descend upon a respectable household and upset its equanimity, which in turn has served at least two dozen past plays, including such recent jewels as *Tenting Tonight* and *Open House*. And spread thickly over all is a track lingo often unintelligible to anyone not brought up in a stable and nourished on oats. This lingo, I am informed by close students, is furthermore frequently less an accurate duplication of the real thing than a theatricalized and artificially colored paraphrase. A little of it, they tell me, is faithfully recorded, but more is phony. It is that way, apparently, with most of these sports argot plays. Not more than one out of twelve catches its vulgar speech with any degree of verity. The before-mentioned Lardner was, as everyone by

this time knows, probably the only playwright who has caught literally the idiom of the eccentric characters he dealt with. Ade invented a lingo that subsequently filtered into the popular speech. Lardner did not invent; he recorded. (Damon Runyon, with a sharp ear, as his stories demonstrate, did not see fit to employ his considerable gift in the one or two plays on which he collaborated.)

To the great majority of writers of sports jargon plays, the jargon seems simply to be a racket. Any such speech, however bogus, is resorted to by them to supply a character and background flavor which they can not otherwise manage. It is, they imagine, their easy way out, since it will impress as authentic the nine people in an audience out of every ten who know the particular lingo only vaguely. This holds true, moreover, not only of sports plays but of most plays given to a vernacular supposedly indigenous to them. And it holds equally true of a sizeable share of popular fiction. The playwrights posture as neo-Lardners merely on the score of changing every "yes" to "yeah" and every "girl" to "broad." They flatter themselves that they have hit off character with a beautiful sense of recognition by having recourse to such stuff as "pleased tuh meetya," "wuz she cold like a clam," or "shake me a hip, baby." And they further congratulate themselves on the precision of their recording ears with a gangster, sports and other patois that no gangster, baseball player, ring pug or racetrack denizen would recognize or could possibly understand without an interpreter, who in all likelihood would not understand it either.

The present authors, in addition, command no humor. When they are not laboring under the delusion that all a playwright has to do to achieve hilarious comedy is to have his characters endlessly hurl insults at one another, they indulge themselves in such material as "Let's form a bookie-of-the-month club"; a female's sarcastic snap to her parsimonious admirer, "I wouldn't give such a fur coat if I was an Eskimo"; and the rejoinder to a character's mention of the phrase, *cum laude*, "Come louder and funnier."

Among the players, only Edith Meiser and David Burns survived the direction, which resolved the evening into so athletically declamatory a performance that the stage resembled an auctioneers' gymkhana.

 OUR LAN'. SEPTEMBER 27, 1947

A play by Theodore Ward. Produced by Eddie Dowling and Louis J. Singer for 41 performances in the Royale Theatre.

PROGRAM

EDGAR PRICE	Irving Barnes	FRED DOUGLAS	Augustus Smith, Jr.
GABE PELTIER	Ferman Phillips	TOM TAGGART	Jay Brooks
EMANUEL PRICE	Louis Peterson	MINNIE	Blanche Christopher
PATSY ROSS	Theresa Merritte	SARAH	Estelle Rolle Evans
JOE ROSS	Augustus Smith, Sr.	JOSHUA TAIN	William Veasey
CHARLIE SETLOW		GEORGANA	Virginia Chapman
	Emory Richardson	DOSIA	Edith Atuka Reid
ELLEN	Valerie Black	OLLIE WEBSTER	Richard Angarola
JAMES	Harold Conklin	LEM	Chauncey Reynolds
DADDY SYKES	Service Bell	CHESTER	Edmund Cambridge
ROXANNA	Margo Washington	HANK SAUNDERS	Charles Lilienthal
DELPHINE	Muriel Smith	CAPTAIN BRYANT	Jack Becker
BEULAH	Dolores Woodward	LIBETH ARBARBANEL	Julie Haydon
RUTH	Martha Evans	OLIVER WEBSTER	James Harwood
MARTHA	Paula Oliver	CAPTAIN STEWART	Gene O'Donnell
ALICE	Mary Lucille McBride	JOHN BURKHARDT	Frank Tweddell

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *A cave on a road to Savannah, evening, January, 1865.* Scene 2. *The forge on an island off the coast of Georgia an afternoon two days later.* Scene 3. *The island three months later.* Scene 4. *April 14, 1865.* Scene 5. *That evening.* Act II. Scene 1. *The island a week later.* Scene 2. *Six weeks later.* Scene 3. *Several months later.* Scene 4. *A week later.* Scene 5. *The following afternoon.*

Director: *Eddie Dowling.*

PRODUCED EXPERIMENTALLY the season before down in the little Henry Street Settlement theatre and now placed on view in a professionally staged and directed presentation, the play was to be commended to those many among us who, like this recorder, have latterly been inclined to side-step the Negro drama which has been ladled out in overdose, which has usually traversed already too well-kenned ground, and which has become a little tiresome in its too

frequent harping on the intolerance and equality theme. There are those of us, indeed, who have thought that one more play by a white author stoutly contending that there is no difference between a George Washington Carver and a George Washington Hill would be rather more than we could intelligently bear. And when it came to Negro playwrights, one more despondently deploring the fact that whites do not treat Marian Anderson with the same respect which they show Liz Dilling or Broadway Rose would, we felt, have a similar effect on us. For this later day tendency in literature and the drama to denounce discrimination between the races and to beseech us to accept a Booker T. Washington or a W. E. Burghardt Du Bois as the equal of a Bugsy Siegel has influenced us considerably less to any commiseration than to a derisory guffaw. What most often has been lacking in the plays by Negroes has thus been self-respect, and in those by whites, sense. And in both, poise. Melodrama has taken the place of rationality; indignation has been substituted for perception; and the thematic game has been played with deuces wild and the joker. The result has been mere sound and fury, signifying nothing but sociological drama in burnt cork.

Ward, a Negro, and his play about Negroes are, however, in a class apart. Commingling power with pity, pride with humility, and hope with despair, the story, reinforced with song, tells simply and affectingly of the Negroes who were given land in Georgia by General Sherman after his Civil War operations in that territory, of the subsequent decision of the Federal government to take it from them, of their struggle to hang on to it and of their final compulsory relinquishment of it, along with their trustful but defeated efforts to cultivate it to their economic independence. The natural tragic force of the theme is immeasurably greater and much more impressive than the artificial soapbox force of all the recent Negro propaganda plays rolled into one.

One of the relative merits of the play is the manner in which the folk songs often have been made to seem a natural and integral part of it. In many a Negro play we have

seen, the songs appear to have been incorporated arbitrarily and have had an unmistakable air of having been fallen back upon to fill in gaps in the dramaturgy and to distract the auditor from the plays' temporary weaknesses. Ward, on the other hand, has utilized them not as such deceptive raisins in a half-baked cake but honestly to hearten and forward his dramatic action and to color his theme interiorly. In the more usual Negro exhibit, the songs are employed much as songs were in the older lesser musical comedies, to break up dialogue in danger of becoming tedious and to bridge with a presumptive acceptability the empty stretches between the love scenes and the comedian's pratt-falls. Whenever in such Negro plays there has been fear of plot drooping or of internal color fading, song has been rushed into the breach, with the consequent impression that one has had some trouble deciding whether one has been invited to attend a drama or a minstrel show periodically interrupted by a dramatic plot.

Another of the play's virtues is the author's control of emotion. While it is present in plenty, it never is allowed to get out of hand and overweigh itself. In the average Negro drama, an excess of emotion is merchanted on the dubious theory that it is characteristic of the Negro, and what results is only a lot of bad melodrama masquerading as the natural expression of Negro character. That the Negro is a more emotional person than his average white counterpart may be true. But the theatrical notion that he invariably conducts himself, in both his serious and lighter moments, after the manner of a figure in the old-time gallery melodramas made up with black greasepaint is surely open to question. Any such notion, I think, is a dramatic skin game.

A third merit is Mr. Ward's beginning of his play at the very beginning and not, as is so frequently the habit among our playwrights, dawdling until such a time as the playwright anticipates that the audience will be wholly in and that quiet will have settled over the house. As almost everyone knows, it is a cardinal article of the American Theatrical Credo that an audience never under any circum-

stances is in its seats on time, and that an opening night congregation especially is always so tardy that the second act sometimes starts before it is fully assembled. I have been going to the theatre for more years now than even a venerable elephant can probably remember and I may report that, while the Credo's article is occasionally true, it is in most cases no more accurate than that other of its articles which maintains that the Cinderella plot, if handled at all well, is always good for money at the box-office.

The normal audience, when and if the house is full, is composed of about one thousand people, and that includes the mezzanine, balcony, boxes, etc. Some of these people are a little late in arriving, but their number is generally in proportion no greater than that which is late in catching trains or, surely, for dinner engagements. I should guess that about ten to twenty would be a fair estimate. And it is the same on opening nights. Since, moreover, the curtains on the latter occasions are usually delayed anyway, it makes small difference. My casual check of première audiences last season showed that not more than twelve people on the average were not in their seats when the play eventually began. But so ingrained is the conviction that at least half the audience is still not seated when the curtain rises on opening nights, and that at least one-fifth is still out gobbling its dinner spaghetti on subsequent nights, that playwrights, with their producers' eager concurrence, write the first five or ten minutes of their scripts with the notion firmly imbedded in their crania. The consequence is that one-third of the new plays back and fill in killing time to bridge the imaginary period and in the process not only ruin what should be their immediate effect but make the large majority of folk already in their seats disgruntled to the point of cursing.

Though the practice is not altogether new, it has been retained in later years to what seems, in view of an audience's increased sophistication, a gratuitous degree. In the older era, it may be recalled, playwrights used to tide over the audience's theoretical late arrival by having a maid character industriously dust off and polish the furniture

which a program note informed us had just been contributed spick and span by one of the smart furniture shops of the time. Or, if they were persuaded that no audience ever conceivably materialized until around nine o'clock, by augmenting the maid with a butler and causing the pair, once the extended dusting and polishing were accomplished, to enter into a lengthy disquisition on the family's personnel, habits, morals, general idiosyncrasies, and pet canary. Though playwrights are no longer quite so obvious, they are still obvious enough. Instead of the maid and the butler solo or in combination, they resort to such manifest dodges as a long-held empty stage amplified after a spell with the protracted ringing of a telephone, or a radio that howls until a character belatedly comes on and turns it off, or a character who enters and strolls around the stage looking at the objets d'art until the mistress of the household, who the maid allows will be down in a jiffy, appears all of four minutes later, or something equally routine and painful.

The formula has become stereotyped. First, the empty stage. Then, if not the telephone bell or the radio, the butler who ushers in a caller. "Thank you very much, Perkins. I telephoned Miss Daphne. Is she in?" "I believe she is, sir; I'll see." "Is Mrs. Vanderbatten at home?" "I don't know, sir; I'll find out." "Today is her day, isn't it?" "Yes, sir, I believe it is, sir. Ah, I see through the window that Miss Daphne is sitting in the garden." "But Mrs. Vanderbatten?" "Yes, I see her sitting in the garden with Miss Daphne." "Will you kindly tell them I am here? Say Mr. Mosebeam." "Yes, sir, immediately." "Don't hurry, Perkins, they may be consulting on something or other, and I hesitate to disturb them until they are finished." And so on. By this time, one of two things has happened. Either the audience has made up its mind, often correctly, that the play is going to be a calf's liver, or it has begun to doze off ahead of schedule.

It is a peculiarity of our relatively better playwrights that some of them are frequently the greatest offenders in this respect. Convinced that everything they write is so

priceless that an audience must not miss a single word of it, they safeguard their great treasures with a wealth of such delaying tactics. The lesser playwrights, on the other hand, who are simply out for the audience's money, more often get down to business at once, and to the devil with the people who come in late. Owen Davis, in, as I recall, *At 8:45*, thus lifted the curtain with a wild pounding on a library door, the smashing into the room of half a dozen characters, their headlong rush to a closet door, its pulling open, and the tumbling out of a murdered body, all within a space of two minutes flat. And — I believe it was in something called *The Donovan Affair* — he started bang off with a scene in which one of the characters seated around a table extinguished the lights to display the luminosity of a precious stone and without further ado was stabbed to death.

I do not say that O'Neill ought to take under advisement a play in which his favorite dramatic philosophical influence, Mother Earth, would assume human form and seize all his confused and soul-searching characters to her bosom the moment the first curtain goes up. Nor do I suggest that George Kelly or any of our other more reputable playwrights lift the curtain on the spectacle of the husband telling off his psychopathically base wife for what she is and filling in the rest of the evening with flashbacks. What I do say and suggest is merely that they and their colleagues in the art of respectable theatrical fare learn that nine hundred and eighty people out of a thousand are usually present when a play begins and that to treat the nine hundred and eighty as infants and morons until the other twenty show up is a not particularly substantial idea. What the lesser playwrights do is not, of course, of much critical account. But, whether of such account or not, I confess to having a lot of good will toward those among them who have indicated that they appreciate that when an audience pays out its good four dollars and eighty cents for two hours and fifteen minutes of entertainment, it is a swindle to cheat it out of ten minutes or thirty-seven cents' worth of it.

So much for Ward's play's credits. Its debilities lie in an over-expansion of and repetitiousness in three of its later scenes which, though they have been a bit tightened in this production, call for a deal more editing; and in an intermittent copy-book flavor in the writing. While most of the latter avoids stenciled expression, there occasionally obtrude such poetastical passages as "Pride without love is like a body without a soul; it's like a flower without the sun; soon turns yellow, shrivels up and dies." The episode in which the heroine relates the circumstances of her seduction and the imminence of offspring additionally follows the pattern of phraseology conventional to the situation over the long years and edges dangerously close to comedy. The author, being yet not too expert in dramaturgy, furthermore permits his tragedy to end on a diminishing note which, while it in more able hands might still have managed a sense of purge and spiritual exaltation, presently tends to give the audience instead a feeling of let-down and dramatic depression. Had he, as counterpoint to the despairful duet of his hero and heroine, shown the white Northern schoolteacher leading the little Negro children over the high island ridge to the mainland and to the possibilities of a Negro future, he might better have served both his final curtain and his play. But to all such suggestions he remained, as is often the habit of novices, adamant. Yet despite such lapses the drama over-all sounds well its eloquent, tragic song.

Mr. Dowling, who was mainly responsible for giving the play its professional hearing, directed it out of a small measure of its earlier lack of cohesion and guided it dramatically to somewhat more secure ends, though the stage lighting was at times so carelessly handled that some of the otherwise apt manipulation lost its effect. Except for William Veasey in the leading male role, whose performance missed all sense of timing and was generally of an unrelieved rigidity, along with an actor or two in minor roles, he also improved the performances of those players whom he had brought uptown and added a desired professional note in the happy recasting of certain other parts which in

the experimental production were handled in slipshod amateur fashion.

There was considerable criticism arguing that the play was better in its original simple mounting than in this more elaborate production. Just how a play can be better or worse than it factually is in any kind of physical presentation, I somehow can not figure out. It may, true, be a better theatrical show in one production than in another, but if the play itself is not still the same play I have lost what critical sanity I once suspected I had.

 THE HEIRESS. SEPTEMBER 29, 1947

A play, based on Henry James' novel, Washington Square, by Ruth and Augustus Goetz. Produced by Fred F. Finklehoffe for the rest of the season's performances in the Biltmore Theatre.

PROGRAM

MARIA	Fiona O'Shiel	ELIZABETH ALMOND
DR. AUSTIN SLOPER		Katharine Raht
	Basil Rathbone	ARTHUR TOWNSEND
LAVINIA PENNIMAN		Craig Kelly
	Patricia Collinge	MARIAN ALMOND
		Augusta Roeland
CATHERINE SLOPER	Wendy Hiller	MORRIS TOWNSEND
		Peter Cookson
		MRS. MONTGOMERY
		Betty Linley

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *An October evening.* Scene 2. *Two weeks later.* Scene 3. *The following day.* Act II. Scene 1. *Six months later.* Scene 2. *Two hours later.* Scene 3. *Three days later.* Scene 4. *A summer evening. Two years later.*

Time: About 1850.

Place: *The front parlor of Dr. Sloper's home in Washington Square, New York.*

Director: Jed Harris.

THE RECENT revival of interest in the writings of Henry James will scarcely be further promoted by this dramatization of his novel *Washington Square* under the paper-back title *The Heiress*. It is not that the playwrights have been too disobedient to his theme, which is of so commonplace a nature that any transgression does not matter much the one way or the other; nor is it that they have done any major violence to most of his characters, at least externally. It is simply that, through the imagined strictures of their medium, they have so scissored and scattered his style and intent that what was literature becomes litter.

I appreciate that this is the conventional criticism of many such efforts to transplant a literary work to the stage. I also appreciate that with repetition it has become a little wearisome to customers of the critical art. But, though it may possibly be tricked now and then into some novelty of

expression and passed off on the less foxy reader for something fairly original, it remains the old simple fact and as such is best to be expressed simply and without fancy trimming.

It is the custom of the theatre in periods of disquiet and discontent to hark back, not without a commercial gleam in its eye, to periods of greater tranquillity. The theory in the case is that the mood of tranquillity will be inculcated in an audience with such consummate effect that it will become blissfully oblivious of its earlier unrest. The theory most often does not work any better than one which might maintain that plays in a period of ease and contentment which were full of bloody alarms would make audiences feel like committing suicide on the spot. Once in a while a play laid in the untroubled yesterdays may, it is true, divert an audience from its immediate worldly concerns. But the play that does so has to have something more than handsome old-fashioned stage settings and costumes, wistful allusions to institutions long since gone their purple way or whimsical references to sirloin steaks at ten cents a pound, and the emotions of innocent adolescence incorporated into characters of adult exteriors. The average play of the species has little more than that and what nostalgia it evokes in its spectators is induced very much less by its elaborately contrived echo of distance than by some such minor stage property as a humorously recalled hand-painted cuspidor or a sentimentally recollected old brocade chair.

The weakness of *The Heiress* lies not only in at least one such direction but in the circumstance that its story, laid in the middle 1800's, is not, as was that, say, of *Life With Father*, particularly flavorful of its period and might just as closely fit 1948 as 1848 or 1850. What it is to all stage intents and purposes is merely another version of the old plot of the bitter father who breaks up his daughter's love affair with a young man on the ground that the latter is a fortune hunter, of the desertion of the suitor when he learns that the girl may be disinherited, of his eventual contrite return, and of her realization of his worthlessness

and her rejection of him. In other words, if stripped of its mid-nineteenth century stage trappings, indistinguishable from a mid-twentieth century copy laid in a house on Fifth or Park Avenue. For the notion that such people as figure in the play and period must invariably have spoken with a tongue approximating that of Henry James is akin to the notion that such as figure in similarly placed plays to-day generally speak with one like Harry James'. The moral philosophy of the James fiction and of the play freely made from it, along with much of the conduct of the chief characters, finds its counterpart, moreover, in the drama of more recent times. And so it is that the exhibit intrinsically impresses one as being largely a stale contemporary play whose staleness has been optimistically camouflaged in the setting and dress of a bygone era.

Aside from *Life With Father*, most of the attempts in later seasons to recapture the sentimental essence of the past, though here and there commercially successful, have missed much critical satisfaction. *I Remember Mama*, while it had its pleasant points, amounted in the aggregate to little more than a box-office shrewdly draped with antimacassars, hung with chromos of an old-time San Francisco, and perfumed with the smell of homemade cookies. *Years Ago*, though it similarly enjoyed its moments, manufactured its atmosphere largely with incorporated allusions to personages and events of its period, and with such obvious properties as unfamiliar telephones, two-pound gold watch chains, and the like. *The Damask Cheek*, for all some graceful prose, had the aspect of a revival of one of Pinero's minor comedies strainfully adapted to the 1909 American scene with such lines as "She's been to the theatre — Sothorn and Marlowe," "She went with Michael to the Bioscope and the Judge took her to hear Burton Holmes," and "I'd been to see *The Easiest Way* only the week before." *The Old Maid*, laid in the middle 1800's, was, by the consent of everybody but the Pulitzer prize committee, unadulterated dramatic rubbish of "The child didn't know who her parents were; only that she was a foundling whom a family had taken in" sort. And *The*

American Way, laid in 1896 and the years following, was a fabricated eye-wetter larded with the names of Mark Twain, Admiral Dewey, William Jennings Bryan, McKinley, Mark Hanna, etc., with such songs as "I'm Afraid To Go Home In The Dark" and "Down Where The Wurzburger Flows," and with references to *St. Nicholas* magazine and Lillian Russell cigars. Nor were any of the other efforts to melt the trade critically any better.

It is the same with this *The Heiress*. All that it sums up to is a pair of Raymond Sovey's heavy velour window drapes drawn aside to let in a windy love story whose age is condoned by laying it in a period when it was theatrically fresher. Jed Harris' staging, now and then excellent, more generally dispirits the evening by sinisterly treating the script as if most of its characters were in imminent danger of being foully murdered. Basil Rathbone's portrayal of the stern father is ably accomplished, but Wendy Hiller in the role of the daughter, while at times valid, relies too greatly on coy inhalations to suggest the character's shyness and on sudden natural breathing to indicate momentary assurance. Peter Cookson is smooth as the fortune hunter; Patricia Collinge, though given to believing that there is nothing like a persistent smile and a head cocked slightly backwards to register an enormous ebullience of spirit, is at least one of the few actresses on our stage who does not pronounce "at all" as if it were a ring-like coral island inclosing a lagoon; and the others acquit themselves handily.

HOW I WONDER. SEPTEMBER 30, 1947

A play by Donald Ogden Stewart. Produced by Ruth Gordon and Garson Kanin in association with Victor Samrock and William Fields for 63 performances in the Hudson Theatre.

PROGRAM

PROFESSOR LEMUEL STEVENSON	CHRISTINA STEVENSON
<i>Raymond Massey</i>	<i>Bethel Leslie</i>
AN UNUSUAL CHARACTER	GEORGE DRUMMOND
<i>Everett Sloane</i>	<i>Byron McGrath</i>
WALTER SMITH	DR. HILLER
<i>Henry Jones</i>	<i>John Sweet</i>
CLIFF SAUNDERS	LISA
<i>John Marriott</i>	<i>Meg Mundy</i>
MARGARET STEVENSON	HENRY HARKRIDER
<i>Carol Goodner</i>	<i>Wyrley Birch</i>

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *After dinner in early June of this year.* Act II. *Six the next afternoon.* Act III. *Eight that night.*

Scene: *The roof-top of the home of Professor Lemuel Stevenson.*
 Director: *Garson Kanin.*

MR. STEWART has been spending the last fifteen years in Hollywood as a writer for the moving pictures. It is apparent that, like many another writer for the moving pictures in Hollywood, he has been thinking. Thinking is the favorite extra-professional exercise of such literati, particularly those who before their fall were on the way to doing creditable work.

The thinking uniformly takes a single course. It assumes the form of a resolve to achieve absolution and regain self-respect through a piece of writing, generally dramatic, which will attest to the fact that prolonged immersion in Hollywood has not, as is offensively supposed, rotted what brains the thinker may previously have had and that, on the contrary, he is still possessed of the upper-crust talents which for so long he condescendingly sacrificed to pecuniary riches.

The cerebration, flowering, thereupon develops into two

bouquets. First, its impresario concludes that his dramatic rebirth must take the shape of a performance which will be so markedly oppugnant to everything in any manner even distantly associated with the screen that people will be transportedly set back on their tails by his inner contempt for the medium and by his re-divulgence of his old, real, admirable self, for years so lamentably suppressed. Secondly, he cautiously decides, the performance must nevertheless, despite its immaculate design, have in it elements contributing to commercial success, since if it were to fail he might not get an invitation to return to Hollywood and would find himself with his chemise hanging out. Our cogitator thus frequently becomes the victim of his own confusion and what he writes is neither fish, flesh nor fowl, but only a marinated herring trailed across the road between the films and the stage. His cerebral fruit, moreover, which in his Hollywood surroundings has impressed him as a veritable bolt from the blue and as something intellectually revolutionary, has long since, he gloomily discovers, become a platitude, and a doddering one, in the more cognizant region of the drama. His dramatic devices, which seemed to him so remarkably original and imaginative in the stereotyped atmosphere of the pictures, have, he learns, been employed time and again in the years he has been absent in that incinerator of talent. And even his commercial sense, so fully developed in him by his film bosses, is often at severe odds with that of the more sophisticated theatre box-office. He finds himself, in short, in the position of one who has been a prodigy in the films and who, attempting to graduate himself from the intellectual low grade, is shocked to realize that he is still just a Quiz Kid, without the answers.

Mr. Stewart, who before he allowed Hollywood to possess him wrote one or two witty and humorous books and even a comedy that contained some fair amusement, is the latest example of what happens to many of these doomed fellows. His *apologia pro vita sua* is called *How I Wonder*, is labeled a comedy, and reflects his confusion by being no comedy at all but, if anything, a fantasy, and as such itself

so utterly confused that it might as well be called anything from a travesty to a greased pig chase with no damage done.

So far as one is able to penetrate the muddle, it seems to concern a professor who champions the brotherhood of man in terms of astronomy, who consults with a male character representing his mind and with a female from another planet representing his emotions, and who gets into difficulties with his college for his resulting ideas, which is not surprising. These ideas, intimated to be of enormous weight, are not, however, imparted to the audience, Mr. Stewart playing safe by merely assuring the latter that they are something pretty special and dropping his curtain whenever their mouthpiece is about to reveal them. Mixed up with all this are the author's Brown Derby musings on the perils inherent in the atom bomb, the advisability of trusting one's heart rather than one's brain, the responsibility of the individual in the restoration of a lasting peace to the world, the danger implicit in shirking one's duties in that direction, and similar overpoweringly unique topics. And further churned into the concoction, as the reader will have perceived, are such deciduous plot materials as the liberal professor in conflict with reactionary authority (the last recent example was *Parlor Story*), such crumbling devices as the personification of mind or conscience (*vide Overtones, The Great God Brown, Peep Show*, etc.), such characters as the mysterious visitor from another planet (*The Red Light Of Mars, Venus, A Messenger From Mars*, and a dozen others), and an attempt at Shavian irony which consists in having the hero confidently proclaim the opposite of what intelligent people intelligently think. A contemplation of Mr. Stewart's mentality, in brief, must inevitably recall the old story of the man who had promised to bring his friend a parrot on his return to France from a visit in America. Arrived home, he suddenly be-thought him that he had neglected his promise, went out, purchased an owl, painted it green, and presented it to his friend. Two weeks later, encountering the latter, he timidly ventured to inquire how the parrot was and if he

talked yet. "Talk? No," answered the friend. "But he surely thinks a great deal."

Garson Kanin, who directed the play, made a valiant effort to clarify it and bring it into some intelligible design. Though he worked some mild order into the chaos, it was far from enough. What we got remained an exhibit whose author had pretentiously reached for the stars, both literally and figuratively, and who had brought down only a bunch of Kleig lights, all burnt out from Hollywood overuse.

Raymond Massey and the rest of the company were up against a tough assignment. That they did not break out with laughter at the absurdity of it was a credit to their professional acting training, if not to their intelligence.

COMMAND DECISION. OCTOBER 1, 1947

A play by William Wister Haines. Produced by Kermit Bloomgarden for the rest of the season's performances in the Fulton Theatre.

PROGRAM

TECH. SERGEANT HAROLD EVANS <i>James Whitmore</i>	MAJOR HOMER PRESCOTT <i>William Layton</i>
WAR CORRESPONDENT ELMER BROCKHURST <i>Edmon Ryan</i>	COLONEL EDWARD MARTIN <i>Stephen Elliott</i>
BRIGADIER GENERAL K. C. DENNIS <i>Paul Kelly</i>	LT. JAKE GOLDBERG <i>John Randolph</i>
COLONEL ERNEST HALEY <i>Neill O'Malley</i>	MAJOR DESMOND LANSING <i>Lewis Martin</i>
MAJOR BELDING DAVIS <i>Robert Pike</i>	MAJOR RUFUS DAYHUFF <i>Walter Black</i>
ENLISTED ARMED GUARD <i>West Hooker</i>	MR. ARTHUR MALCOLM <i>Paul Ford</i>
CAPTAIN LUCIUS JENKS <i>Arthur Franz</i>	MR. OLIVER STONE <i>Frank McNellis</i>
MAJOR GENERAL ROLAND GOODLOW KANE <i>Jay Fassett</i>	N.C.O. PHOTOGRAPHER <i>Ed Binns</i>
BRIGADIER GENERAL CLIFTON C. GARNETT <i>Paul McGrath</i>	CAPTAIN G. W. C. LEE <i>James Holden</i>

The entire action of the play takes place in the office of Brigadier General K. C. Dennis at the headquarters of the 5th American Bombardment Division, Heavy, in England.

SYNOPSIS: Act I. About 4 p.m. on a Saturday afternoon. Act II. Scene 1. About 10 p.m. the same evening. Scene 2. Sunday noon, the following day. Act III. Sunday, the same day. About 8 p.m.

Director: John O'Shaughnessy.

THE BEST of the American plays to come out of World War II remains Harry Brown's *A Sound Of Hunting*. Here is three-fourths of an effective runner-up. Drawing on a first-hand knowledge of his subject matter, Mr. Haines tells the story of a commander of a heavy bomber outfit whose single purpose is to wipe out the three potentially dangerous jet-plane factories deep in German territory and beyond the range of fighter cover and who, because of

the enormous loss of lives and matériel involved, is opposed by politically minded officials in Washington. These, despite his sound and resolute conviction that the sacrifice is vital to the winning of the war and the ultimate sparing of countless men, contrive his dismissal and the installation in his place of a commander who may be more tractable. But the latter, persuaded of his predecessor's accurate judgment, gives orders to pursue the third of the missions, come hell or high water.

This main dramatic current is handled by the author with a firm audacity, with a complete honesty, and with a sharp dramatic drive. Three-fourths of his play, which hew to his line, are thus consequently not only good theatre but alive drama, if of a fundamentally recognizable nature. But in the belief that some sentimental relief is essential to theatrical success, he drags in for the other fourth a mess of moist hokum about solicitous wives back home, the birth of a son to one of the fliers, and kindred hearts-and-flowers stuff which horns into his drama's forthright quality and lends it that greasepaint softness which has been characteristic of so many English war plays and which has made them appear to be collaborations between a military man and a second-rate actress. It is not that the sentiment may not in itself be true. It is once again simply that it is not made to seem so by the playwright and that it accordingly impresses one as having been mechanically lugged into the play much as a torch song is incorporated into a musical show to lend contrast and give relief to a succession of hotsy-totsy numbers. It produces the feeling that the drama has gone off on intermittent furloughs, since on its several returns it takes it some time to pick up where it left off and to get going again.

Aside from these unfortunate interludes, however, Mr. Haines has written directly, forcibly, and without compromise. He is tough without being common, and melodramatic without being cheap. He has accomplished, further, a realistic duplication of his characters' hard speech without recourse to the usual extended profanity and pseudo-colorful obscenity. When he has need of such expression,

it proceeds in both its dramatic and humorous phases from what is acceptable as unvarnished character delineation. Even when there is a trace of seeming exaggeration, as in the case of the pair of Congressmen visiting command headquarters, the character drawing is basically true enough. The general writing may not have much distinction and the play by any scrupulous standard of criticism may be amiss, but, apart from its periods of sentimentality, it manages somehow to lift itself above critical depreciation while in stage action and to seem for the time being superior to itself. Which is always a good trick if a playwright can do it.

The circumstance that a play may be of some recognized theatrical merit does not, however, always necessarily guarantee that a critic who properly records the fact will find it personally engrossing. This, in my case, is to some extent such a play. It is, as I have duly noted, possessed of its unmistakable virtues, but a considerable share of its detail, also duly noted as being unquestionably authentic, eludes my equipment of appreciation. Professionally, I respect the author's extensive knowledge of his subject matter in so far as it concerns everything from precision bombing to meteorological data and from the nature of targets and enemy resistance to aviation mortality statistics. But personally I remain a theatre attendant who is not especially fascinated by the topics. While bowing to Mr. Haines' education in such directions, I do not find them dramatically stimulating. It is the same with books. Give me the ablest book ever written on some such subject as the ice-flows in the Polar regions or the love life of *Zapus hudsonius* and, though my respect for it may be of unheard of proportions, I will give it right back to you. The critic and the man, for all the tempting argument to the contrary, are sometimes two different creatures. It is one thing to appreciate that a play is good; it is occasionally and refractorily another thing to enjoy it.

The acting company, with one exception, is excellent, notably Paul Kelly as the Patton of the air forces, James Whitmore as his ribald technical sergeant, Jay Fassett as

his fearful superior in command, Stephen Elliott as a selfless colonel loyal to his chief, Lewis Martin as a cynical major of intelligence, Paul Ford as a Congressional stuffed-shirt, and James Holden as a youthful flier. The exception is Paul McGrath in the role of the ambitious brigadier general who succeeds to the command of the Fifth Bombardment Division. McGrath, as is his habit, so attitudinizes and so enchants himself listening to the solovox tones which he manufactures out of his larynx that one misses the entrance of Dorothy Kirsten to serve him in a duet. John O'Shaughnessy's direction is fully competent save at such times as he indulges the actors in long pauses and studious perambulations to suggest their seizures of deep and troubled concern. Jo Mielziner's setting and lighting are appropriately realistic.

MUSIC IN MY HEART. OCTOBER 2, 1947

A "romantic musical play," with Tchaikovsky music adapted by Franz Steininger, lyrics by Forman Brown, and book by Patsy Ruth Miller. Produced by Henry Duffy for 124 performances in the Adelphi Theatre.

PROGRAM

TATIANA KERSKAYA	Vivienne Segal	PRINCESS KATHERINE DOLGORUKI	
MISCHA	George Lambrose		Della Lind
PETER ILYCH TCHAIKOVSKY		OLGA	Pauline Goddard
	Robert Carroll	MESSENGER OF THE TSAR	
DESIREE ARTOT	Martha Wright		Edward White
MAURICE CABANNE	Jan Murray	SONYA	Jeanne Shelby
CAPT. NICHOLAS GREGOROVITCH		VERA REMISOVA	Olga Suarez
	Charles Fredericks	LORD CHAMBERLAIN	Ralph Glover
IVAN PETROFSKI	James Starbuck	PRIMA BALLERINA	Olga Suarez
NATUSCHA	Dorothy Etheridge	PREMIER DANSEUR	
GYPSY	Jean Handzlik		Nicholas Magallanes
JOSEPH	Robert Hayden		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. Ballet. "The Storm." Scene 1A. Stage of Odeon Theatre, St. Petersburg. Scene 2. The Café Samovar. A few weeks later. Act II. Scene 1. Nikki's country house. A month later. Scene 2. Road to St. Petersburg. That night. Scene 3. Foyer of Imperial Opera House. A few weeks later. Scene 4. Stage of Imperial Opera House. A few minutes later. (a) Ballet. "Beauty and the Beast." (b) Love Song. Scene 5. Backstage of Imperial Opera House.

Director: Hassard Short.

THE FOREMOST attribute of the show is Tchaikovsky's music under his name and not, as has been the practice, under that of one or another Tin Pan Alley kleptomaniac. While certain of the arrangements of his compositions take liberties of Stokowskian proportions, the music in sufficient measure is allowed to remain his own, which comes as a gratifying relief from the Broadway habit of improving it either with passages cabbaged from Harry Von Tilzer and Raymond Hubbell or manufactured by the tunesmith geniuses aforesaid. The virtues of the occasion, however, stop

there. The book is the one common to the species and, as usual in many of these exhibits about celebrated composers, involves the music master with a fair creature and builds up, grossly to misuse the term, to the final scene of their separation and the heart-broken return of the master to his art. Additionally involved is the consoling episode of his belated recognition and the tribute paid to him by the reigning royalty of the period.

The language in which the affecting tale is couched is not less stock than the plot. "She is lovely — like a flower," sighs the composer upon gazing for the first time on his lady-love. "You are a genius," proclaims the latter, "and some day everybody will know it." At due intervals, someone or other wistfully ventures a "Do you remember?" something or other, which, whatever it is that is summoned to memory, is of a tenderly sentimental nature. And in a more positive direction, there is, of course, the "Ah, Paris, what memories it holds for me!" The humor is scarcely richer. "I am mistress of the ballet," laments the elderly *comédienne*. "That's the only kind of mistress I can still be." "I might have worn sables and mink," warbles the same lady, "but I ended with squirrel and skunk." "Do you recall that wonderful night I came to your room and we loved each other?" inquires the comedian. "Was that you?" returns the *comédienne*.

Among the performers, Martha Wright, an understudy elevated to the leading woman's role, makes the best impression. She is attractive physically and offers a very fair, if at times over-reaching, soprano, but remains to be instructed in the spoken word and in such pronunciations as "modom" for "madame." Charles Fredericks, a meritorious baritone, is miscast as the lover who weans the heroine, the *Désirée* Artot of Tchaikovsky's passion, from the composer; he is more at home in a Show Boat than in a Czarist Russian court. Robert Carroll's Tchaikovsky consists mainly in playing the piano as if the late Helen Morgan were sitting atop it and in bowing from the waist fourteen or fifteen times and kissing ladies' hands. Vivienne Segal, always amusing if she has the necessary material, on this

occasion hasn't it; and Jan Murray in the comedian role would not be amusing even if he had it. A "Beauty And The Beast" ballet, abstemiously danced, adds to the evening's malaises, as do scenic backgrounds that look as if they had been desperately painted an hour before the curtain rang up.

While sitting out a variety of these musical plays, musical comedies and operettas a thought, peculiarly enough under the circumstances, has insinuated itself into my head. To wit, that though all sorts of things are admittedly wrong with the world we are presently in, matters might be a damned sight worse. Consider, for instance, what it would be like to live in one patterned after and identical with such conjecturally idealistic and romantic shows. That they may now and then constitute an escape from the troubled world is perfectly acceptable so far as it goes, but the escape, if any, ends in and with the theatre. Were life to be like one of them, or like a hundred of them operating in unison, the sigh for flight back into the world, poxful though it may be, would be heard beyond interstellar space.

A world resembling one great big musical show would, it is contrarily imagined, be pretty fine all around: appetizing girls, lovely songs, soft lights, wonderful scenery, champagne and kisses, romantic love, and all the rest. On the surface, maybe; but scarcely otherwise. In the first place, one would never stand the ghost of a chance with the beautiful female upon whom one's heart was passionately set, the heroine of one's dreams. That is, save one were a tenor, which one probably would not admit if one's life were at stake. No man, except in the rarest of cases, ever gets the lovely lady unless he has the kind of voice that is good for the bum's rush in any barroom this side of Piccadilly. If, in any musical comedy or operetta, one with a bass voice ever made the slightest headway with the star beauty, the records do not indicate it. Think, moreover, of starting the day, before breakfast and before one has even had a chance to shave, with thirty-two girls smeared up with carmine face-paint buzzing coyly around one and din-

ning a song into one's ears about how jolly life is at that time in the morning. And then, when the girls have finally left one alone, think of a fat comedian getting hold of one, who is still rubbing the sleep out of one's eyes and probably suffering from a hangover, and bombarding one with jokes about marriage, the Dodgers, and Mr. Goldfarb's little son Fitzroy.

You allow that you agree on the morning agony but, ah, you cry, the rest of the day — and night! Yet what of living constantly in the glare of a sizzling, white, hot spotlight? How would you relish having around you at regular half-hour intervals a dozen carbon dioxide showgirls six and a half feet tall who would haughtily look down upon you as a worm? And how would you like to smack your lips at the popping of champagne bottles and then get in your glass nothing but five-cent ginger-ale? You may be discontented with your last year's suit, your frayed shirt and your shoes that need resoling, but after a week or so I entertain a further suspicion that you would be pretty uncomfortable and ready to call quits when it came to wearing heavy velvet capes and fancy silk knee breeches, or, God wot, huzzar uniforms. And don't overlook the greasy pink makeup. What is more, in a world conducted after the pattern of operetta and musical comedy, you would get nothing to eat. It is a phenomenon of such shows that their inhabitants seem to exist without any sustenance whatsoever. In all the operettas and musical comedies of the last fifty years the only food that has been visible on the stage at any time has been a few bananas — and even those few bananas were not in *The Merry Widow* for forty-odd years but were allowed into a revival of it for the first time only a few seasons ago.

There is, too, the matter of drink. In a world indistinguishable from musical comedy and operetta you would be condemned to celebrate the joys of alcoholic liquor and even bourgeois beer with glasses and mugs that did not contain so much as a drop of the stuff. Yet you would be expected to be as gay as a chipmunk and at times to stagger about inebriously as if you had just

emerged from a fortnight's holiday in the Mouton Rothschild caves.

In general hideous illustration, consider New York as it would be if this Mr. Henry Duffy, the Shuberts and our other impresarios were under the new dispensation to be in charge of the city. Either Milton Berle or this Jan Murray would probably be Mayor and your breakfast table newspaper, in lieu of giving you news as at present, would regale you with quotations of His Honor's jokes as of the day before. Instead of reading about the municipality's various activities, you would get an endless dose of stuff like this:

Mayor: Why did they call former Mayor La Guardia "Bud"?

Taxpayer: I dunno. Why?

Mayor: His name was Fiorello, or Little Flower. Bud. See?

The New York *Times*' City Hall reporter's story would run as follows: "Mayor Berle informed the *Times* in an exclusive interview yesterday that he heard two chickens talking and one said sarcastically to the other, 'Listen, Hortense, I don't like to be an old cluck but I read in the paper that former Mayor O'Dwyer once laid a cornerstone.' "

The *Herald Tribune* story would in turn cover City Hall thus: "Asked whether as a baseball player Eisenhower could have beaten him around the bases, Mayor Berle replied, 'He could not! You'll recall he promised not to run.' "

If Jan Murray, on the other hand, were the city's chief executive, the *Daily News* story would probably be: "Mayor Murray said yesterday that he was expecting a letter from the Big Three and that they should have arrived at a decision. Asked whether by the Big Three he referred to Truman, Attlee and Stalin, the Mayor turned a somersault and cracked, 'No. Hart, Schaffner and Marx. I owe 'em three bucks.' "

The waiters in all the restaurants would be comedians, would balance the soup plates on their heads, and would scare the daylights out of you for fear of dropping them on

your lap. When you finally got the soup safely in front of you on the table, you would find a needle in it and would perforce indignantly call the waiter's attention to it. The waiter would then invariably reply, "Sorry, sir. That's just a typographical error; it should be noodle." All the head-waiters would be directed by George Abbott and would gallop madly to and fro, knocking you out of your chair, the while the similarly directed bus boys would dash frantically at two minute intervals to the laboratory, their mouths covered with their hands.

The city's new buildings would be designed by Oliver Smith and other such music show scenic architects and would all be lopsided. Mike Todd would be a Commissioner of Parks and Central Park would be chock-a-block with coloratura sopranos howling their heads off. The thoroughfares would be full of Agnes de Mille ballet dancers with calves the size of oil kegs, all jumping up and down like kangaroos, and if you tried to crowd your way through them to cross the street the Irish cops, instead of assisting you, would hail you with a "Begorra, and do yez think you're a chicken? Why does a chicken cross the road?", thereupon hitting you over the head with stuffed clubs. Your head would sprout two small red and green balloons, and under the city ordinance it would be incumbent upon you forthwith to execute a prattfall. The traffic lights, incidentally, would not be simply red and green but red, green, purple, blue, mauve, vermilion, yellow, peachbloom and chartreuse, and you would become so confused that you would drive your automobile right through the window of Saks-Fifth Avenue and would not be able to stop until you landed in the ladies' room, where you would be arrested as a Peeping Tom by a platinum-haired policeman in a short skirt. When you arrived at the police court, the judge, in all probability Bobby Clark, would wallop you over the head with a bladder, squirt water into your face through his puckered lips, and jump violently onto your lap and imbed your nether-section in a tack which the court attendant had scrupulously poised on the witness chair.

Should you pass a fair creature on the street, should she hintfully drop her kerchief and should you gallantly make to retrieve it, she would snap it back with a rubber string and reward your efforts with an arch "Oo-la-la," which would be no end embarrassing, since your wife would on all occasions necessarily be just coming around the corner and would humiliate you by seizing you by the ear and leading you cringing from the scene. The Fire Department would be manned entirely by dyed blondes who would go to fires perched cheesecake-wise on cardboard apparatus and appropriately singing "You Can Go To Blazes" in voices which would eliminate the need for the sirens. And when you died, you would be interred in Cain's storehouse, with *Toplitzky Of Notre Dame*.

You still believe that to live in a world like *Gypsy Lady* would be delightfully romantic? Have you ever smelled gypsies? You still think that existence as pictured in *La Vie Parisienne* would be ideal? Have you ever taken a good look at nine-tenths of the French midinettes, to say nothing of at ten-tenths of the French opera stars? You still imagine that if the world were like *The Merry Widow* it would be one constant, unending gala at Maxim's? Have you, even in days long before the wars, ever studied those female gargoyles smeared with sickly blue-green makeup, or been charged twenty American dollars for a dollar bottle of champagne *nature* artfully wrapped in a six-dollar monogrammed bath towel, or been bamboozled out of five dollars for a four-franc bunny toy, or eaten horse kidneys slavered with mayonnaise? You envy the romantic world of this *Music In My Heart*? Have you ever been cornered for even five minutes by the conversation of a musician, or have you contemplated the joys of living with a female operatic star?

The world, to repeat, has many things wrong with it but, everything considered, the Shuberts be praised that it is not run like operetta and musical comedy. It is not demanded of one that one arbitrarily stop in one's love-making at ten p.m. sharp and go into a waltz with one's best girl, only to be slapped in the face by her at its conclusion and to be

told that one is a dog and that she wishes never to lay eyes on one again. It is not ordered of one that one burst into song every time the moon comes out, or that one joyously attend banquets at which nothing is served, or that one go wild over ravishing princesses who look like something any high-toned cat would decline to bring in. As things are, one furthermore is not compelled to look out of one's window and go into raptures over the beauty of a Lake Como painted by a blob-artist on a piece of canvas; one need not kneel and humbly kiss the hand of every frowzy old scarecrow nominally a Duchess; one need not go around all day with an idiotic grin on one's face; and one doesn't have to wear tights.

UNDER THE COUNTER. OCTOBER 3, 1947

A comedy with music, play by Arthur Macrae, music by Manning Sherwin, and lyrics by Harold Purcell. Produced by the Shuberts in association with Lee Ephraim for 27 performances in the Shubert Theatre.

PROGRAM

EVIL	Winifred Hindle	ZOE TRITTON	Glen Alyn
DETECTIVE INSPECTOR BAXTER	Francis Roberts	KITTY	Ingrid Forrest
MIKE KENDERDINE		SIR ALEC DUNNE	Wilfrid Hyde White
	Ballard Berkeley	LT. CMDR. HUGO CONWAY,	
TIM GARRET	Thorley Walters	R.N.V.R.	John Gregory
JO FOX	Cicely Courtneidge	MR. APPLEYARD	Frederick Farley
MR. BURROUGHS	George Street		

SYNOPSIS: *The play takes place in Jo Fox's house in London. Act I. Monday afternoon. Act II. Scene 1. Wednesday morning. Scene 2. Thursday evening. Act III. Friday morning.*

Director: Jack Hulbert.

BACK IN THE 1870's, an American actress-manager, Alice Oates by name, found to her surprise that things were not going too well with the atrociously bad comedies she was offering and brewed the idea of making them seem less atrociously bad by incorporating some distracting songs into them. The idea worked, and Oates gathered in the money. Operating on the same theory, the purveyors of this *Under The Counter*, doubtless realizing that the straight comedy in their possession was about as heinous as they come, have added tunes to it but have found to their dismay that American audiences have in some mysterious manner slightly advanced in the seventy-odd years since the Oates era and that the anticipated money-gathering has not materialized. The circumstance that their show ran for two full seasons in its native London conceivably might provide a bit of critical comment at this point, but politeness restrains me.

The comedy, or more accurately farce, which serves as the basis of the evening is still another version of the ancient business about an actress' involvement with her various eager suitors, in this instance optimistically bequeathed a modern flavor with references to black market activities, the eccentricities of British civil servants, and Selfridge's department store. It is, on its own, quite terrible and is hardly improved by musical numbers composed in the key of cold-water flat and lyrics sufficiently suggested by such titles as "No One's Tried To Kiss Me," "Let's Get Back To Glamour," and, in the case of a Russian attempt, "Ai Yi Yi," to say nothing of by a chorus number in which Miss Courtneidge drives the girls with imaginary reins, another in which she is lifted aloft by the girls and carried off in a recumbent position on their bent backs, in that posture executing a droll pose with her chin coyly posed on her forefinger, and still another in which, as a Muscovite ballerina, she finds her large hat constantly falling over her eyes and hilariously bumps seven or eight times into her partner.

Miss Courtneidge, long a London favorite, is on the stage from the first curtain to the last and labors so hard that, if the current English government had had any sense, it would have utilized her to solve the coal problem single-handed. There is not a moment when she isn't capering about the stage, lustily slapping her thighs, frantically dusting off the furniture with her handkerchief, making faces, rolling around on couches, arching her body far over chairs, and conducting herself generally like a chamois giving an audition for George Abbott. It is to be regretted that the humor which proceeds from her convulsions is on the lean side. Her support, except for an Australian siren named Glen Alyn, who has little to do but at least does it quietly sitting down, and for a Charles Butterworth type of comedian named Wilfred Hyde White, is rickety. The ladies of the ensemble are, however, rather more comely than those usually exported in such enterprises.

 DEAR JUDAS. OCTOBER 5, 1947

A dramatization by Michael Myerberg of the poem by Robinson Jeffers, with music by Johann Sebastian Bach arranged by Lehmann Engel. Produced by Michael Myerberg for 16 performances in the Mansfield Theatre.

PROGRAM

THE CARPENTER	<i>Ferdi Hoffman</i>	THE MUTES	PETER	<i>Tony Charmoli</i>
JUDAS	<i>Roy Hargrave</i>		SIMON	<i>Richard Astor</i>
THE WOMAN	<i>Margaret Wycherly</i>		JOHN	<i>Betts Lee</i>
LAZARUS	<i>Harry Irvine</i>			

Scene: *The garden.*

Director: *Michael Myerberg.*

WHAT ARE SOMETIMES indiscriminately referred to as Biblical plays often suffer from their producers' belief that there is but one proper way to stage them and that is with an air of extreme solemnity. This solemnity, moreover, is defined by them not only as merely of a formal or ceremonious character but as something closely approximating the behavior of paid mourners, all in the agonized grip of cholera morbus, at the services for an unidentified small-pox victim conducted by Féodor Dostoievski. Enveloped by mortuary lighting, the actors are either made to walk the stage as if they were carrying two-hundred-pound albatrosses on their backs or, when called upon to indicate exaltation of the spirit, to comport their corpses as if they had suddenly been afflicted with a benign rigor mortis. Their features, in addition, are directed into one of two patterns: an expression intimating that an acute colic has elevated itself into their countenances, or one suggesting that they have got a painful cinder in their eyes and are following the old recommendation that the best way to get it out is to throw the head backwards, look hard at the ceiling, and blink the upper lids ten times in rapid succession.

Only on rare occasions, as in the case of *Family Portrait*, are the plays allowed to behave themselves otherwise. And the natural result is that people are as depressed by them, whatever their possible share of internal merit, as they are depressed by dank walls, funeral music, the spectacle of pain, or Charles Rann Kennedy.

This *Dear Judas*, fashioned from the Robinson Jeffers poem, suffers from the pox as seriously as have most exhibits of the species. Nor is the play, which views Judas in a more favorable light than the traditional, of sufficient strength to triumph over the mopes imposed upon it. It isn't that high resolve — the mark of Mr. Meyerberg as a producer — has not gone into the production. From the Bach choral embellishments to the incidental choreography, the intention to do well by the dramatic stage is clear. It is rather that a script which can not stand up to its producer's faith in it has been further wobbled as theatre by the frequent imposition upon it of a misguided, declamatory and too sanctimonious staging and direction. Much more simply presented, it would still be very far from a good play, but it might possibly seem better than it presently does, at least to that liberal portion of an audience which blissfully accepts a shrewd stage economy as hintful of a recondite and doubtless super-duper dramatic imagination.

Jeffers' retrospective attitude toward the character of Judas, which so outraged the Mayor and official censor of the city of Boston that they indicated they would ban the play were it to be booked in that city, is hardly as sensationally novel as those who plainly have not read their Gospel since childhood seem to imagine. Various celebrated literary figures in the past have also treated Iscariot in a manner not unlike Jeffers, who rationalizes his betrayal of Christ as an attempt to save Him from a course which he, Judas, feels will undo Him and weaken His influence over the people. The approach to the character, while controversial, has some basis in analytical research. It is unquestionably rather the character of Jesus, portrayed as being of a violence not commonly associated with Him, which emerges

on the stage with discomfiture to the pious, though here, too, there is some substantiation in Holy Writ. The fault, however, is not so much in the writing, indifferent as it is, as in the theatrical presentation of the Christ in the person of an actor whose previous appearance was as the potential murderer in the melodramatic thriller *Angel Street*, who proclaims the Jeffers line after the manner of the Jack Daltons in the old ten-twenty-thirties, who is clad in a plaid shirt and leather booted costume not unlike Bert Lahr's in his old Winter Garden wood-chopper song number, and who looks very much like a bewhiskered college football player of the 1890's.

The Jeffers verse, occasionally not without a felicity in phrasing, more generally misses the ring of beauty, the vibrance and the silver irony that the drama demands. As it stands, it is overladen with monotony and underladen with that spark, whether genuine or fraudulent, without which Biblical drama languishes, either critically or commercially, into failure.

The acting performances are uniformly poor. Hoffman's Christ is an uninterrupted succession of hands extended with palms upward orchestrated to the kind of vocal booming associated with the Marcus Superbuses of the old Christian versus Pagan lion-pit plays of the last century. Hargrave's Judas, in the dress of a Humphrey Bogart, seems just to have stepped out of a gangster film. Miss Wycherly's Mary the Mother is resolved into a series of woebegone drones, beatific liftings of the face to the flies, and albatross underprops. And Harry Irvine's Lazarus intones the role into his shoes. The Bach chorals are handled well enough, though some shading would help. The choreography by Esther Junger is set largely to a single stiff pattern which gradually acquires a burlesque effect. And the setting of the garden by Albert Johnson includes something supposed to be a gnarled fig tree which, like the trees, whatever they are, of most scene designers, looks like no tree ever contemplated or produced by nature. I have now seen something like four or five thousand trees on the stage and the only occasions on which one looked anything like a tree was

when the play in which it figured was performed al fresco. Beholding the arboreal specimens in the usual stage production, I find myself jingling, "Poems are made by fools like me, But only God can't make a tree — like Jo Mielziner."

DUET FOR TWO HANDS. OCTOBER 7, 1947

A so-called psychological melodrama by Mary Hayley Bell. Produced by Robert Reud for 7 performances in the Booth Theatre.

PROGRAM

ABIGAIL SARCLET	Joyce Redman	EDWARD SARCLET
HERDA SARCLET	Wynne Clark	Francis L. Sullivan
FLETTY	Ruth Vivian	STEPHEN CASS Hugh Marlowe

SYNOPSIS: *The action takes place in Forsinard Castle, the Orkneys. The time is midsummer, 1904. Act I. Scene 1. Sunset. Scene 2. Three hours later. Act II. Scene 1. The next morning. Scene 2. That night. Scene 3. Dawn, the following morning.*

Director: Reginald Denham.

THE LONDON EXPORT is one of the most ridiculous, non-sensical and preposterous seriously intended plays beheld on the stage in years, and is not so awfully dull at that. Designed as a melodramatic psychological study, it asks us to believe that, if the hands of a man wrongly accused of murder were to be grafted onto the wrists of a poet who had lost his own in an accident, the grafter, though as upright, moral and circumspect as a church deacon, would suddenly feel himself possessed not only of startling amorous proclivities but of potential homicidal tendencies which, if let go, might conceivably exceed those of the curator of Buchenwald. It further bids us to believe that his release from the hellish situation is effected only when he learns that the alien hands' twitchings are not bent on miscellaneous slaughter but are simply indications that their original owner wishes justice be done in the case of the surgeon who betrayed him. Nor does the invitation to surrender to absurdity stop there. The play is so full of it, in the way of character drawing and almost everything else, that so much as one second's reflection would make one laugh louder than at the spectacle of Bobby Clark's feet grafted on Maurice Schwartz. But the oddity is that one somehow is nev-

ertheless frequently persuaded to remit the wholesale bosh and to lend oneself to the moonshine much as one lends oneself to a belief in hair growers, California wines, and women.

Because of the histrionic physiology of the play, it is not, moreover, too hard. Surely no harder than believing, as the late lamented James Agate noted, in the ghost in *Hamlet*, Bottom's metamorphosis into an ass, or the pretence that a young female has only to put on doublet and hose to become completely unrecognizable to her lover. Or, as the still miraculously extant Nathan has from time to time observed, in at least one-third of the stuff on the contemporary stage. At plays like Miss Bell's, one no more asks embarrassing questions of oneself than — again to quote Agate — one asks in a loftier quarter why Sophocles first warns Œdipus that he is going to slay his father and marry his mother and then makes him kill a man old enough to be his father and marry a woman old enough to be his mother.

Hoping to assist the poppycock into some acceptability, the producer printed this note in the program: "The New York *World-Telegram* of September 9, 1947, published a report to the American College of Surgeons of an operation that equipped a fingerless hand with thumb and large finger. The reporting surgeons — Drs. James B. Brown, Bradford Cannon and Walter G. Graham — said that the thumb and finger retained the sense of touch, muscular power and prehensility." The producer unfortunately failed to include with the note another relevantly explaining just how the transplanted thumb and finger might influence the acquirer's mind to the point where it would make him a shoplifter or dealer of aces from the bottom of the deck.

Francis L. Sullivan's first-rate performance of the scoundrelly surgeon did much to lend some bogus credence to the play's asininity, as did Joyce Redman's intelligently exaggerated, third-rate performance of his psychically tortured daughter. Wynne Clark, as the latter's perplexed aunt, helped further by reading her senseless lines so in-

distinctly that one could not make out what she was talking about. In this she was ably assisted by Ruth Vivian in the role of the old household servant. Hugh Marlowe characterized the sensitive poet mainly by making up his face with a heavy layer of whitewash and not having had his hair cut for a month. Reginald Denham's staging included a wind machine that ferociously blew the Orkney coast outside the French windows but somehow peculiarly refrained from mussing in the least the coiffures of the actors who ventured out of doors.

MAN AND SUPERMAN. OCTOBER 8, 1947

A revival of the forty-four year old comedy by George Bernard Shaw. Produced by Maurice Evans for the rest of the season's performances in, initially, the Alvin Theatre.

PROGRAM

ROEBUCK RAMSDEN	Malcolm Keen	MISS RAMSDEN	Phoebe Mackay
MAID	Miriam Stovall	VIOLET ROBINSON	
OCTAVIUS ROBINSON			Carmen Mathews
	Chester Stratton	HENRY STRAKER	Jack Manning
JOHN TANNER	Maurice Evans	HECTOR MALONE, JR.	Tony Bickley
ANN WHITEFIELD	Frances Rowe	HECTOR MALONE, SR.	
MRS. WHITEFIELD			Victor Sutherland
	Josephine Brown		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *Roebuck Ramsden's study, Portland Place, London, 1905.* Act II. *The coachyard of the Whitefield Residence, near Richmond.* Act III. *The patio of a villa in Granada, Spain.*

Director: Maurice Evans.

IT IS THE FATE of the Whig in drama to be converted by time into the semblance of a Tory, and that is what has befallen Shaw, at least in the case of such of his plays as this *Man and Superman*. Originally regarded as something quite philosophically saucy, despite its obvious ideational derivation from Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Co., it presently with the passing of the years seems to be as respectably tame and conservative as an elderly ex-playboy who, though fond of recalling himself as a hell-raiser, has married and wryly settled down. Its wit, once shocking to the easily shockable, suggests now a frock coat at a wienie roast, and its theme of the pursuit of the male by the female, once viewed as boldly venturesome, seems as audacious as the Prince's wooing of Cinderella.

It is an old story, of course, that what has appeared dramatically insurgent to one generation frequently takes on the sound of whimsical popgunnery to a later one. Ibsen, who slammed a door to open it and who startled a dra-

matic world sitting prettily on the gilt chairs of Pinero and his contemporary interior decorators, in due course so came to be looked upon as a sedate, if less parochial, village schoolmaster. Wilde's epigrammatic derisions, regarded as exceptionally impertinent and unblushing, became the favorite quotations of precocious bobby-soxers. Sartre in a very much briefer space of time has already this soon found his Existentialism spelled without the first s. And so, in the instance of his plays like this one, with Shaw.

The great man's whip-cracking disquisitions on the Life Force, socialism, free love and the like, which in earlier days earned him a reputation for intellectual courage and impudence neck-and-neck with that of Brioux for his own against social disease, race suicide and the defects in the system of criminal justice, present today, as do the latter's, the appearance of lame platitudes attempting a jig. Such of his nip-ups as "That's the devilish side of a woman's fascination: she makes you will your own destruction" and "It is the self-sacrificing women that sacrifice others most recklessly," once esteemed as themselves pretty devilish, are belatedly recognized, with a pang, as having been that long ago already belated paraphrases of Rochefoucault et Cie. Lines like "No man is a match for a woman, except with a poker and a pair of hobnailed boots; not always even then," of old thought very nifty, and others like "Marriage is to me apostasy, profanation of the sanctuary of my soul, etc.," earlier considered the height of iconoclasm, have acquired the ring of penny cynicism on the one hand and of Greenwich Village on the other. And all such cartwheels, originally generative of oh's and ah's, as "We live in an atmosphere of shame; we are ashamed of everything that is real about us, ashamed of ourselves, of our relatives, of our incomes, of our accents, of our opinions, of our experience, just as we are ashamed of our naked skins" — all such, and they fill the play, seem as dated as the bravado of Frank Wedekind or the moral philosophy of Henry Arthur Jones.

It is, in summary, not what Shaw says that gives his play what remaining measure of interest it may have; it is how

he says it. For his uncommon drive and force in the art of pure writing are still amply evident, and it is this quality that, like the propulsive reserve of wheels no longer driven by fuel, keeps the play in some motion. Platitude is momentarily refreshed by a swig of alcoholic ink, and staleness inspired with a squirt of belletristic turpentine.

Listening to the admirable phrasing of the Shavian line, whatever its content, we are haplessly reminded how seriously the ability of most of our more conspicuous contemporary American playwrights is disabled by the infirmity of their literary style. With slight exception, any trace of distinction is lacking in even the case of the relatively better plays, and the result is a drama that, however commendable it may be in other directions, has about it an air either of spurious cultivation or of downright commonness.

It isn't that the playwrights do not strive for style. The striving is often only too clammily obvious. It is that by and large they seem to be either incompetent to achieve it or mistake for it a prose which suggests rented white tie and tails or a poetic expression which weds a Tin Pan Alley lyricism with a hamburgered verse form. As examples of the one and the other we may take such figures as S. N. Behrman and Maxwell Anderson. Some years ago, Behrman's writing seemed to be on the point of developing a style both graceful and witty, and in one or two instances was even successful in realizing it. But presently what had borne tokens of some authenticity tended more and more toward the manufactured botanical variety and soon produced any number of such fancy little blossoms (I quote from *Dunnigan's Daughter*) as "I was thinking — a multitude of thoughts — little winds of thoughts, springing up and dying down," and "A slim, golden column; you could be a caryatid holding up the roof of some exquisite Greek temple." Let alone such exalted titbits as "I sense in you tonight a singular mixture of allure and threat"; "The constant hazard rather piques me"; and "A heart-murmur, he said. I was enchanted with the phrase. A murmur. Sounds

like a berceuse. Should be set to music, don't you think? By whom? Debussy, if he were alive . . ."

Worse still, what earlier was simple, fluid and unaffected became transmuted into such jerks and rattles as "The function of the platitude. Very useful. As useful as the coins in a shop. No matter how worn, they serve. If not for platitudes, we should have to bare our hearts. Would one care, in general conversation, for all that nudity?" Or into such starched phraseology as "Surely, Ferne — you are intelligent — surely you don't believe in this universal love-myth hypocritically promulgated by the vested religions." Or into bubble-gum like "The serpent in the garden of Eden — he is coiled around us. We have to throw him off, some way. Evil is mobilized. Goodness not. Goodness is like you, mixed up, not resolute. Yesterday, Ferne, I saw a chance to play God; everybody likes to play God a little bit; but that is dangerous. The other God has seized me. The blind God . . ."

Anderson's gestures toward lyric expression, as has come to be appreciated, have frequently led him into a style not less phony. Though now and again he may capture a pretty phrase, a telling line, the bulk of his later writing amounts to little more than a cotton fancy draped in imitation tulle. In illustration:

"Nothing but just to be a bird, and fly,
and then come down. Always the thing itself
is less than when the seed of it in thought
came to a flower within, but such a flower
as never grows in gardens."

In even more touching further illustration:

"You should have asked the fish what would come of him before the earth shrank and the land thrust up between the oceans. You should have asked the fish or asked me, or asked yourself, for at that time we were the fish, you and I, or they were we — and we, or they, would have known as much about it.

as I know now — yet it somehow seems worth while that the fish were not discouraged, and did keep on — at least as far as we are.”

Compare the pseudo-polished comedy style of a Behrman with, for example, the simple, finished product of an English comedy writer like Maugham. A speech or two from *The Circle* will do. “For some years,” remarks Champion-Cheney, “I was notoriously the prey of a secret sorrow. But I found so many charming creatures who were anxious to console, that in the end it grew rather fatiguing. Out of regard to my health I ceased to frequent the drawing rooms of Mayfair.” Or the same character’s “It’s a matter of taste. I love old wine, old friends, and old books, but I like young women. On their twenty-fifth birthday I give them a diamond ring and tell them they must no longer waste their youth and beauty on an old foggy like me. We have a most affecting scene, my technique on these occasions is perfect, and then I start all over again.”

Or, finally, Teddie’s all too familiar, “But I wasn’t offering you happiness. I don’t think my sort of love tends to happiness. I’m jealous. I’m not a very easy man to get on with. I’m often out of temper and irritable. I should be fed to the teeth with you sometimes, and so would you be with me. I daresay we’d fight like cat and dog, and sometimes we’d hate each other. Often you’d be wretched and bored stiff and lonely, and often you’d be frightfully homesick, and then you’d regret all you’d lost. Stupid women would be rude to you because we’d run away together. And some of them would cut you. I don’t offer you peace and quietness. I offer you unrest and anxiety. I don’t offer you happiness. I offer you love.”

Or contrast the synthetic poetic expression of an Anderson with the true singing line of an Irish playwright like O’Casey. “Ashamed I am,” proclaims O’Killigain in *Purple Dust*, “of the force that sent a hand to hit a girl of grace, fit to find herself walkin’ beside all the beauty that ever shone before the eyes o’ man since Helen herself unbound her tresses to dance her wild an’ willin’ way through

the streets o' Troy." Or, to choose from half a hundred speeches at random, Avril's reply: "It's I that know the truth is only in the shine o' the words you shower on me, as ready to you as the wild flowers a love-shaken, innocent girl would pick in a hurry outa the hedges, an' she on her way to Mass."

In the case of playwrights who elect to abjure the chichi rhetoric of a Behrman or the rhythmic calisthenics of an Anderson, any chance for style goes aground on their peculiar theory as to the spoken word. It is apparently their conviction that the latter can under no circumstances bear any resemblance to the written or so-called literary word, and that, as a corollary, it can have verisimilitude only if it lacks grace. The consequence is dialogue which often not only bears small relation to human speech above the grade of that employed by the lower order of morons but which is ugly and painful to the critical ear.

The notion that the spoken word is dramatic only if it departs sharply from what may be called the literary word is responsible for night after night of such sore lingo as the following:

- a. "Don't fling that at me, Mr. Caldwell — you'll get nowhere with that. That's my wife's attack. 'I didn't take a lover. You took a mistress.' Well, I don't consider that a virtue, see? But to hell with that now. Get this through your heads — all of you. It's not just because my wife's going to live in California that I'm fighting for Christopher — I wouldn't care if she was going to live on the next block. I want my son with me — all the time. I want him to live with me — to be part of my life. I want him." (*Christopher Blake*, Moss Hart.)
- b. "I know! I know! Why bother to step outside and look at life, when it's so cozy indoors and there's always a shelfful of books handy? For God's sake, hasn't anything ever happened to you? Have you never been drunk? Or socked a guy for making a pass at you? Or lost your panties on Fifth Avenue?" (*Dream Girl*, Elmer Rice.)
- c. "I once set up a travel booklet about them. I was a lino-

typer after I had to quit college. You learn a lot of crap setting up type. I learned about the balmy blue Pacific. Come to the Heavenly Isles! An orchid on every bazoom — and two bazooms on every babe. I'd like to find the gent who wrote that booklet. I'd like to find him now and make him come to his goddam Heavenly Isles!" (*Home Of The Brave*, Arthur Laurents.)

The apology that such language is perfectly in key with the characters who merchant it does not entirely hold water. It may approximate the characters' speech to a degree, but only to a degree. It amounts merely to a fabricated approach to the exact speech. Among other things, it misses a fully accurate ear and is simply a paraphrase, and a poor one, of factual speech in terms of stage speech. It is, in short, no truer and infinitely less effective than so-called literary speech.

Compare in this connection, whether for verisimilitude or dramatic effect — it need not, obviously, be added for beauty — such otomyces with dialogue like Carroll's for his Canon Skerritt:

"And since when has the Sacred Heart of our Redeemer, that kings and emperors and queens like Violante and Don John of Austria and the great Charles V and the soldier Ignatius walked barefooted for the love of — since when has it become a sort of snap door chamber where dolts and boobs come to — to kick ball and find themselves tripped up on an altar step instead of a goal post?"

Or like Shaw's for his Candida:

"Ask James' mother and his three sisters what it cost to save James the trouble of doing anything but be strong and clever and happy. Ask me what it costs to be James' mother and three sisters and wife and mother to his children all in one. Ask Prossy and Maria how troublesome the house is even when we have no visitors to help us slice the onions. Ask the tradesmen who want to worry James and spoil his beautiful sermons who it is that puts them off. When there is money to give, he gives it; when there

is money to refuse, I refuse it. I build a castle of comfort and indulgence and love for him, and stand sentinel always to keep little vulgar cares out. I make him master here, though he does not know it, and could not tell you a moment ago how it came to be so . . .”

Or like Synge's for his Conchubor:

“There's one sorrow has no end surely — that's being old and lonesome. But you and I will have a little peace in Emain, with harps playing, and old men telling stories at the fall of night. I've let build rooms for our two selves, Deirdre, with red gold upon the walls and ceilings that are set with bronze. There was never a queen in the east had a house the like of your house, that's waiting for yourself in Emain.”

Dramatic art in America for the greater part has become simply a playwriting business, and its practitioners are largely racketeers with a dramatic sales talk, devoid of anything remotely resembling literary taste, literary ability, and literary education. Most of them read and act like pulp writers crossed with telegraph key-men. Their style, so to speak, follows set tracks and is readily recognizable. It consists in the wholesale use of dashes, as in such dialogue as “Oh, God — if they don't come back — if they don't — come — back —.” It hopes to conceal the obviousness of its content in such apologies as “What I've said — I know it's old hat and that you've heard it many times before —,” etc. It relies upon crew-cut dialogue with its monosyllabic replies as a substitute for both suspense and humor, as, for example:

“Answer yes or no. You live downstairs, I take it?”

“No.

“Oh, you don't live downstairs?”

“Yes.

“Say, what the hell? Do you or don't you?”

“Yes.

“Yes, what?”

"Yes, no.

"Wait, Sergeant. I think I understand her. You mean, yes, you do not live downstairs?

"Yes."

It further cuckoos its own style endlessly: "Everyone's a murderer at heart. The person who has never felt a passionate hankering to kill someone is without emotion, and do you think it's law or religion that stays the average person from homicide? No — it's lack of courage — the fear of being caught, or cursed with remorse. Our murderer is merely a rational animal with the courage of his convictions." Profanity and obscenity are regularly resorted to for a strength of expression that otherwise seems to be beyond the playwrights' competences, and "Jesus!," "Christ!," "God damned," "bastard," and "son-of-a-bitch" are scattered through dialogue like toadstools. "Yeah?" is the mark of vulgar character; "Indeed?" of polite. "Wonderful" is the adjective common to most emotions, whether love or a relish of kidney stew. And the habitual "I mean —" is the refuge less of character than of playwright inarticulateness.

Passion is writ by rote: "But I need you. You know that! And you need me. It's too late. We are helpless now — in the clutch of forces more potent than our little selves — forces that brought us into the world — forces that have made the world! Whether you will it or not, this binding power is sweeping you and me together. And you must yield!" The Pulitzer prize is given for authentic Yankee speech to playwrights who confect such lines as "Let a man get miserable and he is miserable; a woman ain't really happy no other way," and as "It 'us then that the scales dropped from my eyes! An' I seen the truth! An' when I did, everything in the whole world 'us changed fer me! I loved everybody an' everything! An' I 'us so happy I felt jist like I 'us afloatin' away on a ocean o' joy!"

The "punch" style, miscellaneously indulged in, also has its pattern: "The whole damn government's a gang of liver flukes sucking the blood out of the body politic — and there you sit, an honest liver fluke, arranging the graft for

everybody else and refusing to do any blood sucking on your own account! God, it makes me sick!" Cousin to the punch style is the heroic-romantic style: "The important man, George, is the man who knows how to live! I love Hocky, I think an awful lot of him. But, he's like my father. They have no outside interests at all. They're flat — they're colorless. They're not men — they're caricatures! Oh, don't become like them, George! Don't be an important man and crack up at forty-five. I want our lives together to be full and rich and beautiful! I want it so much!" And cousin to the heroic-romantic is also the heroic-scientific: "There is not a man in medicine who has not said what you have said and meant it for a minute — all of us, Dr. Nussbaum. And you are right, my friend. We are groping. We are guessing. But, at least our guesses today are closer to the truth than they were twenty years ago. And twenty years from now they will be still closer. That is what we are here for. Ah, there is so much to be done and so little time in which to do it that one life is never long enough . . . It's not easy for any of us. But in the end our reward is something richer than simply living . . . (*Sighs*) Come, Dr. Nussbaum, a little game of chess, maybe, or (*winks*) a glass of schnaps?"

The melodramatic style generally fits into a mold something like "For the love of God, listen to me! While you sit here quietly eating and drinking, tonight, enemy planes dropped seventy thousand kilos of bombs on Paris. God knows how many they killed! God knows how much of life and beauty is forever destroyed! And you sit here drinking and laughing! Are you worms? Are you lice? Get out of your soft chairs and off your soft tails and do something, *do* something! If you don't, you bastards, as God is my judge I'll bust the jaw of every God damned one of you!" And the "cultured" style, when not in self-protection crossed with a touch of banter, one something like this: "There is in your psychological composition, my dear, a touch of the chiaroscuro of Rembrandt, of the livid gauntness of El Greco, of the stark realism of Goya, of the spring-time freshness of Botticelli. You are, my dear, in other

words, an orchestration of that occasional color monotone in Brahms and that flowery ornamentation in Rossini."

The style is not only the man; the style is the play.

And the style is this *Man And Superman*. Give your ear, for example, to this: "Oh, they know it in their hearts, though they think themselves bound to blame you by their silly superstitions about morality and propriety and so forth. But I know, and the whole world really knows, though it does not say so, that you were right to follow your instinct; that vitality and bravery are the greatest qualities a woman can have, and motherhood her solemn initiation into womanhood; and that the fact of your not being legally married matters not one scrap either to your own worth or to our real regard for you."

Or to this: "I solemnly say that I am not a happy man. Ann looks happy; but she is only triumphant, successful, victorious. That is not happiness, but the price for which the strong sell their happiness. What we have both done this afternoon is to renounce happiness, renounce freedom, renounce tranquillity, above all, renounce the romantic possibilities of an unknown future, for the cares of a household and a family. I beg that no man may seize the occasion to get half drunk and utter imbecile speeches and coarse pleasantries at my expense."

Mr. Evans and most of his company serve the beautifully written play fairly well. It is, however, his evident belief in its persistent philosophical modernity that brings forth the critical reflection, O tempora! O Mauricel

HIGH BUTTON SHOES. OCTOBER 9, 1947

A musical comedy with book by Stephen Longstreet, music by Jule Styne, and lyrics by Sammy Cahn. Produced by Monte Proser and Joseph Kipness for the rest of the season's performances in, initially, the Century Theatre.

PROGRAM

HARRISON FLOY	Phil Silcers	SHIRLEY SIMPKINS	Carole Coleman
MR. PONTDUE	Joey Faye	ELMER SIMPKINS	Nathaniel Frey
UNCLE WILLIE	Paul Godkin	ELMER SIMPKINS, JR.	
HENRY LONGSTREET			Donald Harris
	Jack McCauley	COACH	Tom Glennon
GEN'L LONGSTREET	Clay Clement	MR. ANDERSON	William David
STEVIE LONGSTREET		A BOY AT THE PICNIC	
	Johnny Stewart		Arthur Partington
FRAN	Lois Lee	HIS PLAYMATE	Sonora Lee
SARA LONGSTREET	Nanette Fabray	A POPULAR GIRL	Jacqueline Dodge
NANCY	Helen Gallagher	A BETTING MAN	George Spelvin
HUBERT OGGLETHORPE		ANOTHER BETTING MAN	
	Mark Dawson		Howard Lenters

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Kokomo and points east.* Scene 2. *Living-room of the Longstreet home, New Brunswick, N. J. Early autumn, 1913.* Scene 3. *Redmond Street.* Scene 4. *Near the stadium.* Scene 5. *The Longstreet living-room.* Scene 6. *Road to the picnic.* Scene 7. *"Longstreetville."* Act II. Scene 1. *Atlantic City — the bathhouses.* Scene 4. *Redmond Street, New Brunswick.* Scene 5. *The Longstreet living-room.* Scene 6. *The road.* Scene 7. *The stadium.* Scene 8. *The Longstreet garden.*

Director: George Abbott.

IN THE last five seasons, twenty-seven of the musical exhibits, including revivals, have dealt with past and hypothetically nostalgic years. This is the twenty-eighth. Since an old saying has it that there is something good to be found in even the worst of things if only one will look hard enough for it — as, doubtless for example, in bird's-nest soup and athlete's foot — we obediently look for what is good in this otherwise inferior show. Looking, we find an original and very amusing ballet travesty of the old Mack Sennett Keystone pictures by the talented Jerome Robbins; a funny

act out of burlesque by Phil Silvers and Joey Faye which follows the homosexual comedy pattern of that bygone art and which has been severely criticized as highly objectionable by members of the audience who have burst their sides laughing at it; the presence of the attractive Nanette Fabray in the leading feminine role; and agreeable performances by Jack McCauley, Lois Lee and Helen Gallagher, the last named in a comical tango number. Another item on the credit side is the haphazard nature of the show, at least in my book. What with so many of our contemporary musicals straining for so-called integration and in the process losing that quality of abandon so welcome in the species of entertainment, it is pleasant to get one for a change, let its languors be however manifold, that does not give a hoot for strict, logical form and just throws itself carelessly around.

The aforesaid integrating business, which has lately spread over our musical stage in alarming proportions, is despite the seeming current conviction approximately as new as a Grover Cleveland button. If such shows as *Brigadoon*, *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *Allegro*, etc., are integrated, as their press-agents proudly assert, in the departments of music, dancing, pantomime and the spoken word, equally integrated was the *Music In The Air* of fifteen years ago, not to mention *The Merry Widow* of forty, the *Robin Hood* of more than fifty, the *Billee Taylor* of more than sixty, and various such long-ago others as *Madeleine*, or *The Magic Kiss*, *Dorothy*, *The Chimes Of Normandy*, et al.

All this, however, is just by the way. The immediate point is that, while the integrating business is quite all right critically, I am a bit worried over its future. It begins to look as if it may go too far and as if the time will come when the integrating may become so excessive that our musicals will be as inscrutable to the average customer and as difficult for him to decipher as Pirandello. The time may come, indeed, when the integration may be carried to such an extreme that a Broadway audience will be so confused it will not know when the ballet lets off and when the heroine jilts the archduke for the cowboy. And

when that day comes Michael Todd can make a million dollars reviving *Star and Garter*.

From this distance, I confess that I am scared. My trepidation may turn out to be baseless, but in my frightened mind's eye I can see the shows so integrated that my reviews will probably get Agnes de Mille mixed up with Boris O'Rourke, the comedian, and both confused with the locket which the tenor gives the soprano and which is stolen by Richard Rodgers, the baritone, plotting in cahoots with Agnes de Mille's two pretty serving maids, Oscar Hammerstein and Jo Mielziner.

I may at times be a little tired of the unintegrated shows in which the ballet dancers suddenly enter the hero's father's steel factory and interrupt a meeting of the board of directors by performing *Gaité Parisienne*. I may also at times be rather sick of the coloratura who promptly bursts into song about the beauty of love under the Venetian stars upon observing that Porfirio Katz, the inn-keeper, has ripped his breeches in the rear. And I may no longer be delighted beyond all bounds when a team of acrobats, costumed as the heroine's butler and footmen, come on and do their act in her boudoir. I may, in short, be ready to call it a day for all such shows which apparently have been written and staged by a vaudeville agent in collaboration with a discharged carpenter. But I am not so sure that I will not soon also be ready to call it a day for these others which substitute an equivalent of the exact dramaturgical technique of a Pinero for the old nonsensical abandon of Pixley and Luders, Henry Blossom and Alfred Robyn, and Harry B. Smith and Ludwig Englander. The danger is that the musical stage may come to the point where, except for the incorporated tunes and dancing, it will too closely resemble the dramatic stage. The straws are increasingly in the wind. The current tendency toward rigidity in form may convert what should properly be a carefree gypsy art into more or less sedate bastard drama.

It seems, in brief, that as the technique of the drama grows freer, that of the musical shows becomes more confined and restricted, and that the shows are taking over the

old, outmoded dramatic technique. The change is for the worse, and in two ways. In the first place, the shows make too much sense. And, in the second place, no one any longer feels like taking them out to supper, much less for a hansom ride around the Park afterwards. They are pretty and attractive, but they are a little too intelligent and too formal.

George Lederer, who in the pre-Ziegfeld period produced some of the happiest shows our theatre has known, had a *recipé* which he resolutely adhered to, and with large success. "Let a show start out with some sense," he once explained to me, "and then let it gradually lose it." Any show that persisted in being logical to the end, he felt, did not belong on the musical stage but on the dramatic. And somehow I think he had a lot there. These strictly integrated and logical shows may be to the taste of such critics as approach the musical form of entertainment with the same solemnity they approach the dramatic, but they are sometimes a little disturbing to those wiser ones who look upon it as a potential gay holiday from lofty and sacrosanct standards. It is these possibly more acceptable fellows who, like Thomas Hardy and Max Beerbohm, like Archer and Walkley, and like Huneker and Chief Justice Holmes, rescind their intellectual quotient when the occasion is one of song and dance and pretty girls and deck out their critical heads with cap and bells. What they want is not artistic symmetry but wild folly, not reason but cajoling imbecility. Since even the most perfectly integrated and intelligent show is perceived to be pretty ridiculous when closely analyzed, why not put the horse before the cart in the first place?

What we ask for, in a word, is not a return to the shows of merry village maidens, the princess disguised as a lieutenant of Black Huzzars, and the comedian who comes on with a beer spigot attached to his seat. What we ask for, in another word, is not the old, silly, romantic hokum interrupted by dialect comedians with chin whiskers and pillows stuffed into their pantaloons. What we ask for is just some of the old natural and easy and wonderfully enter-

taining absurdity, some of the old happy-go-lucky inconsequence, and less of the studiously ordered and determined diversion which we are doubtless due to be in for. That we will not get it is more or less certain. That what we will get will probably in some cases be critically worthy is equally certain. But I have a feeling that however critically worthy it may be, it won't be much real fun.

But if this *High Button Shoes* enjoys such virtues, its over-all lapses tend to make one largely oblivious of them. The book is a vaudeville's-eye view of its author's family in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in 1913, and has all the literary merit of the old Keith-Albee skit in which the baggage-man who came in to remove the trunks was mistaken for an English lord, and all the humorous merit of the one in which the piano-mover was mistaken by the young society girl for her millionaire fiancé who had been absent for a year in Asbury Park. The music is the kind that the waiters in the night clubs hum on their way to the service kitchen, and the wit consists in alluding to Henry Ford as Hank, in such repartee as "How's crops?" "I haven't shot crops for a long time," and in remarks about selling swampy real estate by the gallon. The lyrics narrate that, while love may be desirable, it is security that a girl should keep her eyes on, and that getting away for a day in the country is wonderful. At the conclusion of the song numbers the principal singers throw their arms wide open and the chorus raises its in turn in military salute. Tap dances and dances in which the boys lift the girls into the air also are not missing. And the décor and costumes, by Oliver Smith and Miles White respectively, both often commendable fellows, are on the visibly economical and unattractive side.

ALLEGRO. OCTOBER 10, 1947

A musical play by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. Produced by the Theatre Guild for the rest of the season's performances in the Majestic Theatre.

PROGRAM

MARJORIE TAYLOR		GREEK PROFESSOR	Raymond Keast
	Annamary Dickey	BIOLOGY PROFESSOR	Robert Bryn
DR. JOSEPH TAYLOR	William Ching	PHILOSOPHY PROFESSOR	
MAYOR	Edward Platt		Blake Ritter
GRANDMA TAYLOR		SHAKESPEARE STUDENT	
	Muriel O'Malley		Susan Svetlik
FRIENDS OF JOEY	{ Ray Harrison	BERTRAM WOOLHAVEN	
	{ Frank Westbrook		Ray Harrison
JENNIE BRINKER	Roberta Jonay	MOLLY	Katrina Van Os
PRINCIPAL	Robert Bryn	BEULAH	Gloria Wills
MABEL	Evelyn Taylor	MINISTER	Edward Platt
BICYCLE BOY	Stanley Simmons	MILLIE	Julie Humphries
GEORGIE	Harrison Muller	DOT	Sylvia Karlton
HAZEL	Kathryn Lee	ADDIE	Patricia Bybell
CHARLIE TOWNSEND	John Conte	DR. BIGBY DENBY	
JOSEPH TAYLOR, JR.	John Battles		Lawrence Fletcher
MISS LIPSCOMB	Susan Svetlik	MRS. MULHOUSE	Frances Rainer
CHEER LEADERS	{ Charles Tate	MRS. LANSDALE	Lily Paget
	{ Sam Steen	JARMAN	Bill Bradley
COACH	Wilson Smith	MAID	Jean Houloose
NED BRINKER	Paul Parks	EMILY	Lisa Kirk
ENGLISH PROFESSOR	David Collyer	BROOK LANSDALE	Stephen Chase
CHEMISTRY PROFESSOR		BUCKLEY	Wilson Smith
	William McCully		

SYNOPSIS: *The story starts in 1905 on the day Joseph Taylor, Jr., is born and follows his life to his thirty-fifth year. The three major locations of action are: Act I. His home town and his college town. Act II. A large city.*

Director: Agnes de Mille.

A REVIEW of a musical show is entertaining in the degree that the show itself is not. Little is more difficult than getting the flavor and spirit of a really good show onto paper. But with a bad one the job is easy. You can amuse the

reader with such critical monkeyshines as professing to admire its great wit and recording as prime examples some of its deadlier jokes, or arguing with a straight face the æsthetic superiority of its batty plot to that of *Ariadne Auf Naxos*. You can describe its lifted synthetic tunes in terms of the criminal statutes covering kidnapping and bigamy, and parallel its lyrics about the stars, the moon and thou with verses composed by the latest child prodigy unearthed in Jackson Heights or Brooklyn. You can, in short, cut up and, if you happen to be in any sort of form that day, give the more blasé of your customers a reasonably diverting time, especially since many of them eccentrically view the stage as a bull-ring and the critic as a matador, and are understandably disappointed if the bull isn't knocked off and its ears and tail tossed to them. The trouble in this case is that the show under review, though a pronounced let-down from its authors' previous works, is not in its entirety quite dreadful enough to warrant such bloodthirsty treatment and that as a consequence the remarks on it may not be of the slaughterous nature seemingly so enchanting to the jaded and bloodthirsty reader.

While the show produced the night before, whatever else may be said against it, has a conciliatory unpretentiousness, this *Allegro* is as pretentious as artificial jewelry, and just about as valuable. In the case of their previous big successes, *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*, the Messrs. Rodgers and Hammerstein leaned on plays by Lynn Riggs and Ferenc Molnár for their inspiration. Here, they have gone it on their own, or at least on Hammerstein's own, and with scarcely salubrious results. What their book amounts to is a pompous combination of the poorer elements of Andreyev's *The Life Of Man*, which form the earlier parts of their exhibit, and of Wilder's *Our Town*, which in paraphrase form the later, and with an old D. W. Griffith going-forth-to-meet-the-dawn ending tacked on for extra depressing measure. Mixed with the vermicelli, furthermore, is not only such hokum mush as the time-honored wedding scene and the ghost of a mother who returns at intervals to counsel her son from error, but a cocktail party chatter-

box number paraphrased from an old Noel Coward show, a college boy number dittoed from an earlier George Abbott one, and various other elements hardly rivalling the daisy in freshness. In an effort to lend the sentimental old stuff an appearance of freshness nonetheless and to camouflage the general lack of imagination there is recourse to enough stage machinery to equip Drury Lane for a decade: sliding platforms, hydraulic curtains, loud speakers, flights of steps, Royal Navy regatta lighting, lantern slides, and almost everything else but a buzz-saw and a *Ben Hur* treadmill. What undoubtedly started out in the authors' minds as a simple story simply told and simply sung has accordingly taken on a sufficient physical rowdydow to serve Strindberg's *Dream Play* as it might have been staged by Piscator in his Berlin heyday.

The alleviating interludes are few. Agnes de Mille has provided some fair choreography, though I for one might wish that she would call quits on the mesozoic business of female dancers derricked into the ether by their male companions and on having pairs of dancers intermittently fly madly across the stage and kick their right legs backwards just as they reach the wings. There are several passable songs by Rodgers, though none up to his former standard and though the ordinarily ingenious Hammerstein has tumbled lyrically into such themes as "Money Isn't Everything," "What A Lovely Day For The Wedding," and a variant of "The Lady Is A Tramp" called "The Gentleman Is A Dope." And, to continue the brief catalogue of purely relative merit, there are attractive performances by Roberta Jonay as the wife who deserts the hero bent on a medical career, John Conte as his cynical friend, and Lisa Kirk as the steadfast nurse with whom at the finish he walks soulfully toward the movie sunrise. There is, too, Jo Mielziner's initiatedly contrived setting to substitute for the authors' absent fancy. But, though the show has been acclaimed by some of my colleagues as a rare masterpiece and as marking a tremendous advance of the American musical stage, I otherwise can not see it. All that I can see is an attempt to break away from the more conventional

pattern and achieve a show of affecting simplicity which has wound up so complexly conventional and so complexly simple that it turns turtle. A lot of time and money have gone into the undertaking. A little more time and less money might have improved things. The impression of the whole as it stands is of a little yokel girl in a cheap calico dress and with a rhinestone tiara on her head optimistically riding a rocking-horse in a race with Whirlaway.

The show, which begins in 1905 with the birth of its protagonist and follows his career to his thirty-fifth year, is the twenty-ninth in a five year span which has set itself to evoke sentiment out of the past. The sentiment which is evoked in this instance is closely identified with that of an inebriated adult melting at the sight of a kiddie-car in a toy shop window. Its well-spring is in the projected theories that the city is ruinous to a serious career and that only in the small town may a man develop his resources, that people in a metropolis are dipsomaniacs and neurotics whereas those in the hinterland communities are possessed of all the healthy virtues, and that true love is doomed in an environment where the buildings are more than three stories high and can flourish only in one whose lavatory facilities are idyllically situated in a back-yard. The show is also another of the integrated species. All its elements, save one, have been integrated with painstaking care. That one is entertainment.

MEDEA. OCTOBER 20, 1947

A free adaptation of the Euripides tragedy by Robinson Jeffers. Produced by Robert Whitehead and Oliver Rea for the rest of the season's performances in, initially, the National Theatre.

PROGRAM

THE NURSE	<i>Florence Reed</i>	CREON	<i>Albert Hecht</i>
THE TUTOR	<i>Don McHenry</i>	JASON	<i>John Gielgud</i>
THE CHILDREN	<i>Bobby Nick</i>	AEGEUS	<i>Hugh Franklin</i>
	<i>Peter Moss</i>	JASON'S SLAVE	<i>Richard Hylton</i>
FIRST WOMAN OF CORINTH	<i>Grace Mills</i>	ATTENDANTS TO	<i>Martha Downes</i>
SECOND WOMAN OF CORINTH	<i>Kathryn Grill</i>	MEDEA	<i>Marian Seldes</i>
		SOLDIERS	<i>Ben Morse</i>
<i>Jon Dawson</i>			
<i>Richard Boone</i>			
<i>Dennis McCarthy</i>			
THIRD WOMAN OF CORINTH	<i>Leone Wilson</i>		
MEDEA	<i>Judith Anderson</i>		

The entire action of the play occurs before Medea's house in Corinth.

Director: John Gielgud.

A THEATRE PUBLIC that esteems something like an *All My Sons* for the power of its tragic purge must plainly be a bit abashed in the presence of anything like the *Medea*. A catharsis satisfactorily obtained from rhubarb surely finds dynamite a little superfluous and discommoding. It is for this reason that a producer who hopes to keep any such Greek tragedy going beyond the next Saturday night necessarily has either to coat it with appetizing marquee names or bring it into some modern acceptance with an adaptation of one kind or another. Anyone who imagines the contrary must believe that the Æschylus trilogy from which O'Neill derived *Mourning Becomes Electra* would have matched the long run of the latter, or that the two day engagement of Euripides' *The Trojan Women* some seasons ago might not have been extended for at least a few days

more if the cast had included Helen Hayes, Gertrude Lawrence, the Lunts, and Joe Louis, in whiteface.

It is thus that the Messrs. Whitehead and Rea have wisely seen to it that the Euripides drama has been filtered through the fluent modern verse of Robinson Jeffers and brought into the appreciation and convenience of the contemporary theatre through such devices as giving the original Messenger's speech detailing the horror of Jason's bride's cremation to the Nurse character with whom the audience has been acquainted throughout the play, an integration of the disturbing chorus into the body of the drama, a more congenial imagery in the general treatment, and, among other things, an ending in which the impossibly spectacular dragon-drawn chariot with the dead children is supplanted by Medea's more practical barricade of her house against Jason and the baring of his sons' corpses within the doorway and within range of his grimly punished vision. The producers have astutely further seen to it that the acting company includes such names as Judith Anderson, John Gielgud, and Florence Reed, and that the costumes and scenery will please an audience with the thought that they cost a lot of money.

But should anyone regard this preamble as a reflection on the presentation, let him promptly be disabused. Jeffers' free, de-godded rendering of the great tragedy is a more than acceptable performance — much superior theatrically to the Gilbert Murray translation; and the delineation of its leading role by Judith Anderson in all save the last moments suffices it handsomely. It is an occasion to be recommended to that share of our audiences whose theatrical stimulation is somehow not entirely accomplished by musical show sliding platforms, the startling philosophy that women frequently pursue men, and celebrated literature that is made into plays by deleting its literary quality. It is only, as noted, in the later portion of the drama that Miss Anderson, like an otherwise All-American fullback who has exhausted his resources in the three earlier periods of the game, misses. Up to that point, she is excellent. But thereafter her power seems partly to wane and her vocal

projection partly to weaken, and the mounting climax of the play consequently fails to explode. Gielgud's Jason is Ivor Novello in whiskers and gives the effect of a tenor Siegfried cast as a bass Hagen. Florence Reed's Nurse, except for the articulation of "them" as "thum" and a too unrelieved Bela Lugosi facial expression, is satisfactory. And the rest serve.

While commending anew the fluid grace of Jeffers' treatment, it may incidentally be observed that the drama vouchsafes him luxuriant opportunity to indulge himself in the grisly, for which he has ever indicated a quenchless fancy. I submit a few gory samples:

"They would indeed be happy to lay their hands on my head: holding the very knives and the cleavers that carved their sire."

"If I could tear off the flesh and be bones; naked bones; salt-scoured bones . . ."

"The unburied horror, the unbridled hatred, the vultures tearing a corpse."

"If I should go into the house with a sharp knife to the man and his bride, or if I could fire the room they sleep in, and hear them wake in the white of the fire, and cry to each other, and howl like dogs, and howl and die . . ."

"A young mare broke from the chariot and tore with her teeth a stallion."

"I'd have your bony loins beaten to a blood-froth."

"White-hot, flaying the flesh from the living bones; blood mixed with fire ran down, she fell, she burned on the floor writhing."

"The fire stuck to the flesh, it glued him to her; he tried to stand up, he tore her body and his own; the burnt flesh broke in lumps from the bones . . . They lie there, eyeless, disfaced, untouchable; middens of smoking flesh . . ."

"The harsh tides of breath still whistled in the black mouths."

"If he were my own hands I would cut him off, or my

eyes, I would gouge him out . . . I want him crushed, boneless, crawling . . .”

Coming again to the quality of Miss Anderson's performance, we may also reflect that one of the supplementary functions of the theatre is the providing of its patrons with the opportunity to become wroth with one another over their personal estimates of its actresses. The opportunity is no new dispensation; it has been a boon for years. Nor has it been taken full advantage of by the laity only; the critics, those theoretical cocks of jurisprudence, have no less exercised their gala rights and privileges. Long before the arguments over Bernhardt and Duse shattered the rafters, no actress, however eminent in her craft, was spared her share of artistic disparagement, which on occasion approached the obscene. And the battles, which often have edged toward fisticuffs, continue unabated to this day and hour.

They are understandable. For not only, apparently, in any appraisal of an actress must the appraiser's insuppressible personal prejudice for or against her visually and corporeally be taken into the referee's consideration, but the appraisal itself is founded upon the inexactness of just what it is that constitutes or does not constitute histrionic virtuosity. Many people, of course, can recognize absolutely bad acting when they see it. But it is doubtful whether they are quite so proficient in assaying the middle ground, and more doubtful still whether they can recognize the real thing for what it is. It isn't that they may not feel that the performance is a good one; it is simply that they do not know, and could not for the life of them explain, why it is.

Margaret Anglin, for example, is in the opinion of many one of the most expert actresses that the modern American stage has offered. Yet, because many, many more have not taken to her stage-wise *in propria persona*, not only has she been a less than popularly endorsed one but has not been drafted for a play in some years. Maude Adams, on the other hand, was in the opinion of just as many

an actress of very considerably less stature. Yet, because many, many more were pleased with her as a stage figure, she reigned in the popular favor until her voluntary retirement. Today, in further example and confusion, the popular esteem in which Katharine Cornell is held materially outmeasures that which is the portion of this Judith Anderson, though it would be hard to believe that the latter is not the superior in every department of the craft save alone looks and personal magnetism. I shall not be so unchivalrous as to mention names in another and more severe direction, but at least one current actress whose knowledge of the calling is wholly superficial is nevertheless pretty generally accepted as the genuine article by laymen and many professional critics, while one who could give her cards and spades, and even a pair of aces on sleeve elastics, is amiably but nonetheless firmly dismissed. The former simply happens to be blessed with a striking personality, whereas the latter was neglected in that attribute by the good fairies at cradle-time.

It is that way often. The only actress on the present American stage whose proficiency has not suffered critically from any such external physical considerations is Helen Hayes. But there are others who have found themselves victims and whose measure of talent has in turn found itself up against the hurdle.

Several seasons ago, a young novice, Barbara Bel Geddes, was acclaimed as a surprisingly adept actress for her performance in *Deep Are The Roots*. Her performance was an appealing and charming one and, further, her personality fitted the part and her pretty looks enhanced it. That much freely granted. But of acting, except in the most elementary and obvious sense, there was little. And so with all but two of the various lauded girls who have played the role of Sally Middleton in the popular comedy success, *The Voice Of The Turtle*.

There is the matter, too, of direction. That many an actress has received credit which properly belongs to a skilful director is an old story. And that many an unskilful director has not received blame for an actress' poor performance

is an equally old one. But there are very few people, and that includes a fair number of the professional critics, who are able to discern where the director begins and the actress lets off, or vice versa. There have been and there are actresses who on rare occasions have managed first-rate performances in spite of their directors. But there are very many more whose abilities at times have been hamstrung, distorted and botched by them.

The late Henry Miller, one of the best directors of acting our theatre has known, was able to make an only passable actress seem for the time being to be one of high competence, and to make a really good one seem even superior to herself. And the same held true of David Belasco, empiric in other dramatic departments though he may have been. In the case of both, it sometimes happened that when an actress left the fold and came under other direction her audiences could not understand why one previously venerated by them as something of a histrionic genius had so suddenly deteriorated and gone to pot.

There is probably no actress on our stage at the present time who knows more about the technical aspects of acting than the German-born Elisabeth Bergner. But most of her performances are bad for the reason that her husband, Paul Czinner, who has long directed her, permits her so to overlay and lacquer her essential competences with personal tricks and mannerisms that the abilities are buried and made mock of. There is, in turn, an actress contemporary with Miss Bergner who obviously knows little more about her craft than a moderately talented amateur. Yet shrewd direction now and again has been successful in palming her off on audiences, along with many of the critics, as an actress of some authentic position. In this, she is helped of course by a considerable physical attractiveness and a flair for comporting herself with an interesting dash.

A canny director sometimes succeeds in covering up an actress' deficiencies and embellishing her better qualities through one chicane or another. If her walk is on the ungraceful side, he sees to it that she either does considerable sitting or moves behind obscuring chairs, sofas, pianos, and

what not. If she is graceful, as Gertrude Lawrence is, he takes every advantage of a script to work in as much movement for her as he can, short of converting the occasion into a semblance of *Les Sylphides*. An actress who may be awkward in gesture is protected by a constant interruption of gesture on the part of her acting vis-à-vis. One who is expert in it is allowed to go to it with a cast directed as if it were afflicted with paralysis of the arms. There is no actress so poor that she can not be made to appear better by directing the others on the stage to seem as poor as she herself factually is. There is hardly one so good, on the other hand, that she may not be made to appear less so by directing another in her most important scene either quietly to underplay her or convincingly to pretend to a winning humility in the presence of the august one.

Duse became at least in a measure the figure she was because D'Annunzio, during his reign over her, not merely wrote roles exactly fitted to her but, more importantly, saw to it that the woman as woman was never too much superseded by the woman as actress. Réjane triumphed when she slapped any director who sought to elevate greasepaint over inner composition and spirit. "I am for nature and against naturalism," said Coquelin. He also said what is in large part the sharpest commentary ever written on acting, "The two beings which co-exist in the actress are inseparable, but it is the one who sees who must be the master. It is the soul, the other is the body. It is the reason, and its double is to the other as rhyme is to reason: a slave who must obey. The more it is the master, the more the actress is an artist."

The nature of a role is frequently another item in the confusion of appraisal. A wrong role, as should be sufficiently known but frequently is not, may give to what is critically very good acting the effect, in the minds of many, of very poor. Helen Hayes' performance in *Mr. Gilhooley* in a role quite unsuited to her, for example, was at bottom as expert as many of her other performances, but simply because her personality was at variance with the role most of her audiences charged the poor effect to her act-

ing. Ina Claire was every bit as proficient in an ill-suited dramatic role in *Children Of Darkness* as she has been in comedy roles, but the objection to her by tryout audiences was such that she saw the way the critical wind would blow if she appeared in it in New York and abandoned the part.

The late Charles Frohman was sagacious enough not to allow his stars, with rare exception, to take any such chances with a chuckleheaded public and its critical guides. He accordingly almost always saw to it that they played much the same role, whatever the play and whatever the role may have been called. One of the few chances he ever took was with Ethel Barrymore in Galsworthy's *The Silver Box* and, though she was first-rate in it, her audiences still admired her talents more greatly in her previous pretty little nothings. He said that he should have learned his lesson in the case of Maude Adams in *The Pretty Sister Of José*. The relative virtue of her performance was lost sight of because of the strangeness of the role, and she was charged by the opaque, both lay and professional, with shortcomings which mostly and actually were non-existent.

A more recent illustration. Three seasons ago, the late Laurette Taylor's portrayal of the mother role in *The Glass Menagerie* was hailed, and deservedly, as one of the finest examples of the acting art that our contemporary stage had seen. But I wonder how many of her eulogists knew why it was what it was, that is, aside from its readily to be discerned and appreciated aspects. Did they know, for instance, that she on this occasion profited herself by rejecting Coquelin's dictum, "The first duty of a player is respect for his text; whatever he says must be said as the author wrote it"? Far from doing any such thing, she threw a lot of the Tennessee Williams text to the winds and adapted and rephrased it, very ingeniously, to her own personal acting ends. Did they further know that her performance varied markedly from night to night, that it was never the same, and that she skilfully maneuvered it to the different reactions of successive audiences?

Did they appreciate her dexterity in timing her laughs so

that they would not suffer from what coughing there might be in the audience? Did they know that what seemed "natural" in her performance was frequently the result of audacious ad libbing? Did they understand that seldom was her articulation and modulation of a line of dialogue the same, and that in this regard she followed her instinct as to a particular audience's character and receptivity? Did they comprehend, in short, that what they regarded, and correctly, to be the top acting performance of its year was not one performance but successively all of a dozen or more, that its entrepreneur had directed herself in it without outside aid, that she created a character out of bricks and straw supplied only meagrely by the playwright, and that she literally acted the woman who was Laurette Taylor into a role which itself did not in any way even faintly resemble her and which in sum, for all its embroideries, remained Laurette Taylor from first to last? She did not, as the expression goes, lose herself in the part. She lost, and with uncommon beauty and effect, the part in Laurette Taylor.

Where, in such a case, do the stern critical principles regarding the art of acting find themselves?

AN INSPECTOR CALLS. OCTOBER 21, 1947

A play by J. B. Priestley. Produced by Courtney Burr and Lassar H. Grosberg for 95 performances in the Booth Theatre.

PROGRAM

ARTHUR BIRLING	<i>Melville Cooper</i>	EDNA	<i>Patricia Marmont</i>
GERALD CROFT	<i>John Buckmaster</i>	ERIC BIRLING	<i>John Merivale</i>
SHEILA BIRLING	<i>Rene Ray</i>	INSPECTOR GOOLE	
SYBIL BIRLING	<i>Doris Lloyd</i>		<i>Thomas Mitchell</i>

It is an evening in spring, 1912.

All three acts, which are continuous, take place in the dining-room of the Birlings' house in Brumley, an industrial city in the north midlands.

Director: Cedric Hardwicke.

ONE OF THE most overdone plots in the modern drama is that in which a strange individual insinuates himself into a household of hypocritical, uncertain and bewildered folk and eventually awakens them to a recognition of their true inner selves. The visitor is sometimes a male, sometimes a female, but in either case is invested with a more or less mysterious and inscrutable presence. If a male, he may vaguely be hinted to be of divine origin, as in *The Passing Of The Third Floor Back*, *The Servant In The House*, etc., or, if the playwright be of waggish bent, may be ultimately revealed, for all the stir he has wrought, as something of a loafer, as in *At Mrs. Beam's*, etc. If the caller be female, she most often is either one about whom little is known save that she has led what may politely be termed a worldly life, as in *A Strange Woman*, *Outrageous Fortune*, etc., or one about whom slightly more is known, including the impolite fact that, unlike the other and despite her comparative inscrutability, she has accepted money for it, as in *Passersby*, *The Outcast*, etc. So apparently irresistible is the theme, indeed, that sometimes the role is even reduced to ingénue status and its incumbent

presented with no enigmatical rigmarole but simply as a chick whose wide-eyed artlessness and natural frankness charm the previously unsweet household into an affinity with angel-cake, as in *Peg o' My Heart*, *et al.*

A variation of the plot shows up once again in Mr. Priestley's play. In this case the visitor is intimated to be a creature possessed of a divination approaching the supernatural, though what he seems rather to be is simply Conscience out of the old morality plays dressed not in the usual black and white nightshirt but in a brown mufti number. As is customary in plays of the kind, the intimation is conveyed to the audience by having a sensitive female character suddenly pause from time to time, permit a look of perplexity to cross her features, and gaze at the other characters with an expression suggesting that her scanties have got loose from their moorings. The caller's business similarly follows the familiar basic pattern and the household, come eleven o'clock, is duly brought to realize the error of its previous ways.

Priestley, as is his wont, here and there writes intelligently and agreeably but, as is also frequently his wont, does not sufficiently convert the intelligent and agreeable writing into satisfactory drama. There is the feeling about most of his plays that they are first drafts, impatiently released to clear his desk for the next one. At the rate he has been going, he will probably toss off more before he finishes than even Lope de Vega or Owen Davis and, unless he takes greater care with them, they will not be any better than the great majority of those artisans'. There are one or two tolerable scenes in this, his latest, but on the whole it repeats itself with the embarrassing insistence of spaghetti marinara, and with the same disturbing taste.

Cedric Hardwicke's direction is first-rate, and the better performances are those of Melville Cooper, Rene Ray and John Buckmaster, though surely not that of Thomas Mitchell, who brings to the role of the occult caller only that kind of studied, mechanical underplaying which passes with uneducated audiences for extraordinarily experienced emotional control and inner understanding.

The play in several directions indicates the haste in which it was written. Since it makes motions, however awkward, toward some quality, one may fairly ask questions in its presence which would be foolish in the case of frankly cheap box-office goods. Why, for instance, do the characters who suspect the visitor to be no inspector at all but an impostor not demand to see his credentials or call up police headquarters at once instead of delaying until the very end of the play? Why did the presumptively sympathetic heroine, declared as being not of easy virtue, frequent a bar for promiscuous women after her first experience with illicit sex gained there? Is there not considerable coincidence stretching in the circumstance that the prospective son-in-law of the household and the son thereof have enjoyed directly successive affairs with the girl without either, though intimately associated, being aware of the fact? And so on.

In another direction, had Priestley taken the time to scrutinize his manuscript more closely, would he not have deleted the surplusage of its sermonizing on the responsibility of the individual for the acts of others? It presently obtrudes like a pastor at a cocktail party, though cocktail party is scarcely a term to be employed in connection with so teetotalitarian a play. And would he have allowed himself a trick ending, which in any dramatic case is scarcely appropriate to a play which asks one to submit seriously to the body of its argument? Mr. Priestley, in short, is a careless craftsman, and careless craftsmen are certain to founder in any such dramaturgical attempt to dovetail mysticism and reality.

THE DRUID CIRCLE. OCTOBER 22, 1947

A play by John van Druten. Produced by Alfred de Liagre, Jr., for 69 performances in the Morosco Theatre.

PROGRAM

MISS DAGNALL	Lillian Bronson	TOM LLOYD-ELLIS	Walter Starkey
PROFESSOR WHITE	Leo G. Carroll	MEGAN LEWIS	Susan Douglas
PROFESSOR PARRY PHILLIPS		BRENDA MADDOX	Neva Patterson
	Noel Leslie	MRS. WHITE	Ethel Griffies
MADDOX	Boyd Crawford	MISS TREVELYAN	Merle Maddern
TOBIN	Aidan Turner	BLODWEN	Cherry Hardy

SYNOPSIS: *The action passes in the early twenties in a small university town near the borders of England and Wales. Act I. Scene 1. The senior common room. Mid-morning, Wednesday. Scene 2. The Maddoxes' flat. Late the same afternoon. Act II. Professor White's flat. Saturday afternoon. Act III. Scene 1. The senior common room. Tuesday morning. Scene 2. The Maddoxes' flat. Tuesday evening.*

Director: John van Druten.

IN THE INSTANCE of this latest play by the talented van Druten, I feel much like the juryman in the old story. After long and exhausting days, opposing counsel in a case were able to find only one juror upon whom both could agree. Putting their despairing heads together, they finally concluded, with the court's permission, to dispense with the other eleven and to trust the issue to the single selection. When the trial was finished, he was bidden to retire and to meditate his decision. After some hours he returned, took his place in the box, and was asked by the judge if he had arrived at a verdict. He nodded that he had. The judge instructed him to face the court and to state it. "I disagree," he announced.

Like that juror, I disagree with myself over *The Druid Circle*. On the one hand, it approaches its subject matter intelligently but, on the other, does not sufficiently resolve the intelligent approach into consistently engaging drama. On the one hand, it is interesting in separate episodes but,

on the other, fails to maintain that interest in its entirety. On the one hand, it is ably written if considered scene by scene but, on the other, is less ably written if considered as a whole, since its dramaturgical design has too little cohesion. It is effective in part, but in general too languid and dawdling. It proves again its author's sharp sense of character, but the characters do not always serve toward the necessary dramatic vitality. It is, in brief, to be respected for its honesty and periodic skill, but in the end it does not satisfy.

It is the author's purpose to indicate, through the person of a sterile college professor long bogged down in the academic groove, that a pathological hatred of youth and youth's ways may develop in such a man, and to such a degree that his overt acts may bring tragedy to the objects of his aversion. After a tedious first act in which the ground-plan is laid with the painstaking of a one-armed landscape gardener, van Druten brings his theme into direct focus in a second, but there is yet a third which backs and fills and gets less than an inch or two beyond what the preceding act has stated and accomplished. It is an act arbitrarily made to kill time until its final three minutes wherein is suggested the professor's mild seizure of doubt over his antecedent malicious conduct in torturing a boy and girl student with a passionate love letter written by the former which has fallen into his possession.

By far the best scene, a fresh and initiatedly written one, is that in the middle act between the dried-out, hidebound professor and his liberal-minded and sharp-mouthed old mother. It is in van Druten's most original and most admired comedy vein, and I hope that I do not too greatly exceed the accepted limits of criticism in regarding an author's work when I allow that I wish he might abandon these not altogether successful excursions into serious drama and devote himself to the comedy form in which he has demonstrated himself to be so pleasantly accomplished.

The author's direction of his play is, as usual, of a high proficiency, and several of the acting performances, especially those of Leo G. Carroll as the protagonist and Ethel

Griffies as his maternal parent, are laudable. There is a nice bit, also, by a promising novice, Neva Patterson, in the role of the wife of a younger professor whose sympathies are with the oppressed and tormented youths. The play in its tryout stage was laid in 1912 and the dress of the characters was of that period. Just before the New York opening, the period was advanced to the early 1920's and, with little time for new costuming, the actors were left largely to their own devices. The consequence was a sartorial hybrid of high-buttoned jackets, pleated trousers and sports sweaters that made most of the male characters look as if they were their own fathers wearing parts of their sons' wardrobes at a reunion of the class of 1940.

HOBOS IN HEAVEN. OCTOBER 28, 1947

A fantasy by G. M. Martens and André Obey, with incidental music by Claude Arrieu. Produced by the Blackfriars' Guild for 24 performances in the Blackfriars' Guild Theatre.

PROGRAM

BOULE	Leo Herbert	BARTENDER	Nappy Whiting
FLAVIE	Kate Gibbons	LUCIFER	Alan Glendenning
GOELEKE	Gertrude Murphy	BALTIE	Kate Gibbons
SEXTON	Alfred Reilly	ST. MICHAEL	Michael O'Casey
RUETJE	William Dunn	ST. NICODEMUS	Nappy Whiting
MANSE	Margaret Mohan	ST. NICHOLAS	Angy Vitanza
DJAKKE	Charles Metten	ST. PETER	Tom O'Connor
JACKASS	Tom O'Connor	BLESSED VIRGIN	
CONSTABLE	Warren Burmeister		Rose Mary Mechem
BELLHOP	Alan Mazza		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. A tap-room. Act II. Scene 1. Ante-room to Hades. Scene 2. Gate to Heaven. Act III. The tap-room.

Director: Dennis Gurney.

ANDRÉ OBEY, known to American audiences only through his *Noah*, *Lucrece*, and his collaboration with Denys Amiel, *The Wife With A Smile* (*La Souriante Mme. Beaudet*), is a witty Frenchman whose other plays have been considered too unsubstantial for the American stage by producers of such exceptionally substantial drama as *Laura*, *I Gotta Get Out*, *How I Wonder*, *Duet For Two Hands*, and similar refreshments. In this case, he is represented merely as an adapter, since the play is the product of the Flemish Martens. Exactly what he did or did not contribute to it I can not say, the original being unknown to me. Ignorance is further complicated by the circumstance that his adaptation has been readapted by local amateur hands. The end-product is a garble of fantasy and farce which in no detail suggests anything resembling the Obey we know and which is altogether rather undelicious.

There may have been a theme of some point in the original but, if there is one in this mangled version, I do not seem to be able to ferret it out. All that I can exhume is a confused and duncish to-do about a pair of tramps who are run down by an automobile and declared dead, who find themselves alternately in Hell and Heaven, who are offered a Liliom-like chance to return to earth and redeem themselves, and who are eventually found not to have died but possibly to have dreamed their adventures.

The acting, direction, and staging were more hellish than heavenly; and the incidental music only aggravated matters.

THE WINSLOW BOY. OCTOBER 29, 1947

A play by Terence Rattigan. Produced by the Theatre Guild, H. M. Tennant, Ltd., and John C. Wilson for 215 performances in the Empire Theatre.

PROGRAM

RONNIE WINSLOW	<i>Michael Newell</i>	JOHN WATHERSTONE	
VIOLET	<i>Betty Sinclair</i>		<i>Michael Kingsley</i>
GRACE WINSLOW	<i>Madge Compton</i>	DESMOND CURRY	<i>George Benson</i>
ARTHUR WINSLOW	<i>Alan Webb</i>	MISS BARNES	<i>Dorothy Hamilton</i>
CATHERINE WINSLOW		FRED	<i>Leonard Michell</i>
	<i>Valerie White</i>	SIR ROBERT MORTON	<i>Frank Allenby</i>
DICKIE WINSLOW	<i>Owen Holder</i>		

SYNOPSIS: The action takes place in Arthur Winslow's house in Kensington, London, shortly before the first World War. Act I. Scene 1. A Sunday morning in July. Scene 2. An afternoon in April (nine months later). Act II. Scene 1. An evening in January (nine months later). Scene 2. An afternoon in June (five months later).

Director: Glen Byam Shaw.

THE PLAY, based on the celebrated Archer-Shee case, treats of a British father's long battle to clear his fourteen-year-old son of the charge of having stolen a small sum of money while a cadet at the Osborne naval academy. The fight becomes a national issue, is debated in Parliament, and wrecks the father's health and fortune, but eventually succeeds in freeing the boy from suspicion and in establishing the rights of private citizens against bureaucratic arrogance. The exhibit is, of course, at bottom the familiar one in which a person wrongly accused of a crime is finally, after more vicissitudes than an audience can shake a stick at, declared innocent and falls again, exhausted but triumphant, into the arms of his loved ones; and by making the accused a youngster, the theme naturally gains an added theatrical value.

Back in the 1890's, particularly in England, which is the birthplace of the specimen under scrutiny, it was the cus-

tom to center the plots of such plays on a big cross-examination scene, usually in those days concerned with uncovering an illicit sexual episode in the past life of the female protagonist. Mr. Rattigan here again borrows it from the long ago and presents it in variation as one in which a celebrated lawyer confronts the accused boy and over a considerable period tries to break down his profession of innocence. It still, despite its age, makes for a good scene, and as played by Frank Allenby and young Michael Newell, momentarily induces one to suspend critical cynicism and interestedly to accept it much as a child similarly accepts, with an eye on the potential two-bits in his grandfather's hand, one of the old gaffer's oft repeated stories. The play on the whole, indeed, though its mechanism is always visible and ticks loudly and though some of its scenes are arbitrarily written into it rather than, as the German musical phrase goes, composed through it, amounts to very fair theatrical goods. There are even times when it is a little better than just that, since its author, though operating in what is generally a journeyman box-office style, shrewdly strains what might readily become crude melodrama through a sieve of humor. Some of the latter, emanating from character, falls nicely into the pattern. But at other times his all too evident effort to cadge the groundlings brings him to such passages as the elegantly reserved counsellor's stylishly superior objection to the bad English in the phrase "nation-wide laughing-stock" and, a moment later, his observation that he can not abide the House of Commons because of "the cold drafts and the hot air."

Any such play obviously stands or falls on its acting and this one gets the benefit of some able, which by virtue of the precise British accents accompanying it persuades an American audience that it is much finer than merely that. Of the players, the best are Webb and the before mentioned Allenby, the latter of whom enjoys that elaborate poise and air of high address which were the property of Alexander, Faversham, Hawtrey and other such grandees of a bygone stage and which, criticize as hamminess if you will, are all the same immensely effective.

Unlike the monolingual American traveling in Germany who, looking upon the numerous signs *Autobahn*, was puzzled by the many tributes to America's foremost ornithologist, I do not find it at all difficult to understand why the Ellen Terry award, England's equivalent of the local Pulitzer Prize, was bestowed upon the play. It is simply that most awards in any country designed to recognize plays of real merit are most often given to plays largely without it. I sometimes believe that if only an annual award were to be instituted for the worst play we might very possibly be gratified to find in the play at least some of the quality which the various boards of award presently profess to see in their choices of best. Mr. Rattigan's play is very far from falling into the category of worst; it is, as has been said, fairly impressive showshop material; but if it was the best play of its English year, God save the English drama.

EDITH PIAF AND COMPANY

OCTOBER 30, 1947

A vaudeville bill. Produced by Clifford C. Fischer for 48 performances in the Playhouse.

PRINCIPALS

Edith Piaf, Les Compagnons de la Chanson, Les Canova, George and Tim Dormonde, Alma and Fleury, and George André Martin.

THE SHOW, including its star, is the kind encountered in the past in one or another of the little music halls on the Paris Left Bank, admission to which was a few francs or, in some cases, merely the appearance of having enough sous in one's pocket to pay for a beer. At a theatre price of four dollars and eighty cents, it is in an anomalous position.

The first part of the bill consists in a pair of alleged Greek dancers, male and female, who perform less well than any pair of chorus dancers in a local Jerome Robbins or Agnes de Mille show. The couple is followed by a male duo who perform, as God is our judge, on unicycles, one of them seemingly being of the opinion that homosexual conduct is amusing. Now still another male couple with nude, thickly powdered bodies who, after the routine principles of the many vaudeville equilibrist acts which, like this one, are invariably billed as "Poetry In Motion," alternately lift each other slowly and with a great deal of muscle quivering off the floor and then slowly and with a great deal of muscle quivering again deposit each other on it. Follows a portly Gaul who fits miniature costumes to his right hand and mimics various dancers with his fingers. He is expert at the trick. And, finally, nine young Frenchmen who call themselves "Les Compagnons de la Chanson," who give their impressions of an American jazz band, American microphone crooners, Russian Cossack choirs, etc., and who on the opening night were cheered, by what was ap-

parently a copious claque, with considerably more volume than would be the portion of the nine members of the Supreme Court if they unanimously rendered a decision that the legal limit of personal taxes was henceforth fifty cents a head. The young men, it seemed to me, were only moderately entertaining, since I can no longer find much exhilaration in the old-time two-a-day comedy act in which a man exercises himself frantically in trying to lift the lid of a grand piano and in which after a great flourish on the keyboard he pauses a moment and then hits a high note with his little finger, or in imitations of the contortions of jazz musicians and, at this late hour, of the March of the Wooden Soldiers.

The second part of the evening is devoted to Mlle. Piaf. The Mlle. Piaf is a small, chunky woman with tousled reddish hair, heavily mascara'd eyes, and a mouth made up to look like a quart bottle of metaphen. According to a quotation from one Schoenbrun in the playbill, "She is the particular favorite of the midinette, the charwoman, the poor student, the factory worker, the millions of pale, thin girls who live gray, toil-worn lives. Piaf is each one of them. When 'La Môme' (as she is known) sings of her cold-water flat, her 'cracked walls and gondola bed,' she is moaning for all of them. When Piaf finds a lover who holds her in his arms and turns her miserable room into a palace, you can hear the sighs of happiness from the crowded music hall as each Parisienne finds escape with Piaf."

Very probably. For there can be small doubt that our chanteuse has the forlorn appearance and melancholy mien, sedulously accented by shabby dress and the other accepted stage concomitants of poverty, which always companionably impress the emotions of counterparts in life. And that impression is automatically deepened by a voice which, whatever the nature of the song, cultivates the pitch and tone of guppy despair. So much may be granted Piaf. But, for all the fact that she seems to have been very successful in liquefying her French clientèle, not quite so much may be granted her on the score of any real artistry. She sings all songs much alike. There is scarcely any change

in emotional pattern, or in expression, or in projection. One and all begin in a low key and mount gradually into a terrific abdominal, chest and laryngeal explosion, accompanied either by the pointing of the index finger at the audience or by the extension of the arms laterally. And all are sold with the same set woebegone look, the same set air of heartbroken but brave defeat.

The repertory, as has been intimated, is, furthermore, largely the standard boulevard one: the song about *l'amour*, the song about the married woman retracing the joys and sorrows of her tragic life, the one about the little merry-go-round in the park in the days when the singer was happy, the other one about the forsaken prostitute, and so on.

That returning American voyagers often go overboard in their testimonials to such singers is an old story. It is also an understandable one, in a manner. The impulse to overrate a performer whom one has heard in some out of the way little spot in a foreign country and whom one feels one has one's self surprisingly discovered is common to most travellers, particularly those who have wandered out into the Paris night with a few drinks under their belts and, possibly, with a pretty girl to hold hands with while the singer is sighing of love. Under such circumstances Piaf would undoubtedly do. But on the stage of a cold-sober theatre and in a colder and more critical land I suspect that her appeal misses something.

TRIAL HONEYMOON. NOVEMBER 3, 1947

A farce-comedy by Conrad S. Smith. Produced by Harry Rosen for 8 performances in the Royale Theatre.

PROGRAM

ELSIE	Mildred Munroe	DR. TRUMBULL	Stapleton Kent
LINDA MELTON	Ellen Fenwick	BILL DANIELS	Ed Moroney
CRAIG DENNING	Joel Thomas	IRENE SMITH	Eileen Heckart
GEORGE WILLOUGHBY	Jack Fletcher	FANNY WILLOUGHBY	Helen Waters

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Bungalow No. 9, Hotel Del Rey, near Los Angeles, noon on a June day in 1946.* Scene 2. *Late afternoon.* Act II. Scene 1. *That evening.* Scene 2. *Later that evening.* Act III. *The next morning.*

Director: Edward Ludlum.

A PRODUCT of the summer theatre circuit, the play is of the sort which too often provokes sarcastic comment on the rural playhouses *in toto*. It is, true enough, an opprobrious little thing, with its amateurishly written story of a couple whose marriage ceremony is delayed and who go away on an impromptu honeymoon, but to believe that it represents the summer theatre stages in the aggregate is scarcely the fact. The latter, it seems to me, have been getting an unfair deal for some time now. It is not, certainly, that they haven't their several shortcomings — say about forty or fifty — but, along with them, they also have their virtues, and it is these that are generally lost sight of. They provide, first, both individually and collectively a repertory theatre that meets the requirements of those who endorse repertory as one of the desirable items of the dramatic stage. They secondly keep the spirit of the theatre alive in the municipally dead summer season and bring the drama to many people in towns and villages remote from the theatrical centers. They thirdly afford employment and a livelihood to many actors and actresses. They

fourthly give the latter valuable added training and experience. And they fifthly provide a testing ground for new scripts. That they also in the general process occasionally provide some audience pain is, as has been intimated, perfectly true. But pain is often the handmaiden of ultimate accomplishment.

One of the most effective means of ridicule is to attach a catchy derogatory label to a person or an object. Such labels as "cowsheds," "barn theatres," etc., promiscuously pasted on the bucolic playhouses, have accordingly brought them into disrepute. Probably not more than one out of every five of the playhouses was originally a cowshed or barn, but such is the power of the labels that most people expect a cow or a horse to amble out onto their stages at any moment. The first step the theatres should take is to band together and form a committee of defence and attack after the technique of the city of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Let anyone write and any editor print a facetious allusion to that city in terms of the furniture which has made it famous and not only stern demands for retraction but grim threats of lawsuits involving millions of dollars are the immediate consequence. The next time anyone refers to one of the summer theatres' converted town halls or churches or especially constructed edifices as a mule garage or a pig salon, let the manager set up a Grand Rapids howl. He may, true enough, not be able to collect any monetary damages (though I don't see why he shouldn't), but he will at least get some very good publicity, which is always helpful.

The trouble with big city critics of the rural theatres is that they criticize them from the big city viewpoint. This is quite meet so far as the craft of criticism goes, but it is considerably less meet otherwise and practically. The little rural theatre is simply the big city theatre on vacation in slacks and sports shirt, and to expect it or ask it to behave city-wise is unjust and senseless. What is more, to imagine that that liberal share of its audience which is recruited from residents in the adjacent hamlets is as knowing in the ways of drama and acting as city folk are supposed to be is

equally foolish. And what is still more, to hope to train it overnight into any such knowledge and appreciation is doubly so. Yet this seems to be the attitude of those urban critics who travel out into the countryside or motor from their woodland retreats to appraise the little showhouses. They do not expect the small country fairs and carnivals to be Coney Island or Ringlings' Circus, but they appear to expect the small summer theatres to be the counterparts of those on Broadway.

All this is not to say that I have recanted and regard the pastoral houses with a rich and beaming eye. If some of them now and again are deserving of pleasant words, a lot more are scarcely the stuff on which critical dreams are made. That is not the point. The point is that, however I personally may or may not feel about them, they serve a rather valuable purpose and that to dismiss them with a superior shrug isn't cricket. There are a number of things that do not enchant me, yet, like the rural theatres, they nevertheless are hardly on that score to be condemned, and thus to condemn them would be the mark of a grandiose half-wit. I am not, for example, impressed as many others are by the tonal art of George Gershwin, the literature of André Maurois, the humor of P. G. Wodehouse, the painting of Braque, or the Italian cuisine. But they surely are not to be summarily deposited in the ashcan on that ground. And so it is that, while the rustic drama may not inspire me to throw my hat into the air and myself along with it, I am still bountiful enough to allow that it has its place in the theatrical scheme of things.

I will not go so far as to say that any theatre is better than no theatre. No theatre would be a great deal better than the kind of Broadway theatre which heaves at us stuff like *The Magic Touch*, *Heads Or Tails*, and this *Trial Honeymoon*. And no theatre would be a lot better than the kind of rural summer theatre which offers their equivalent, with equally bad acting. But even a fair rural theatre is much better than no rural theatre at all, and that is the sum and substance of the argument.

The previous summer, with more than one hundred of

the little houses in full flower, proved that there is a place for the out-of-season drama, and a rather big place at that. It also proved that more and more people are becoming interested in the living drama and perhaps less rapturously interested in its filmed counterpart, which promises well for the theatre's future. After all, people have to go through kindergarten before they can enter grammar school and through grammar and high school before they achieve college. The little theatres are, variously, those earlier schools. The spitballs, pigtail pulling, and bent pins on their seats are a part of their being, and as such are paternally to be overlooked and forgiven.

As to the performance of the unseemly example of summer dramatic art under consideration, silence is not only golden but is set with a large ruby.

THIS TIME TOMORROW. NOVEMBER 3, 1947

A play by Jan de Hartog, originally called Death Of A Rat. Produced by the Theatre Guild for 32 performances in the Barrymore Theatre.

PROGRAM

WILTS	John Archer	YOLAN	Ruth Ford
KARELS	Tyler Carpenter	WOUTERSON	Sam Jaffe

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. A dissecting room in the Amsterdam Institute of Scientific Research, prior to the Nazi invasion. Scene 2. The deck of a ferry boat on the Zuyderzee, prior to the Spanish Civil War. Scene 3. A room in Dr. Wouterson's house, Amsterdam, some weeks later. Act II. Scene 1. The dissecting room. Scene 2. A room in Dr. Wouterson's house. Scene 3. The same, one week later. Scene 4. The dissecting room.

Director: Paul Crabtree.

ASHTON STEVENS reports that at the fall of the final curtain on the opening night of the play's Chicago tryout, Mr. Justice Robert H. Jackson of the United States Supreme Court turned to him and exclaimed, "I give up! Now I realize what Mark Twain meant when he said, 'The more you explain it, the more I don't understand it.' " May I dissent from the learned Justice's opinion? I boast that I understand it perfectly, and without need of any explanation whatsoever. It is, I may confide to the eminent jurist, gassy balderdash pretentiously offered as profundity, and with little more sense than a pack of mousehounds.

It may be, however, that de Hartog is a slick young Hollander who possibly appreciates that there is no better way to put over a play on any pseudo-highbrow producer than that employed by the meat-market chisellers. Which is to say, the palming off of a small pork chop as of surplus heft by fixing the scales with a false weight. And when it comes to false weight, our Dutch brother is one of the best flimflammers the theatre has laid eyes on in a long time. His

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play is one-ounce drama passed off for an intellectual, philosophical and scientific ton by loading it up with solemn bosh about everything from hypnotism to symbolic astrology, from cancer research to metaphysics, and from psycho-therapeutics to what well may be the most revolutionary theory heard of in the world since Genesis, to wit, that, if a woman of nymphomaniac tendencies pines for love and gets it, her contentment will be so great that it will kill her.

There are, of course, people who, like the minds responsible for the production, are inclined to accept nonsense obscurely stated as something doubtless invested with a rare and remarkable significance. De Hartog is in this direction the kind of dramatist who is their true beloved. Exercising an elaborate species of double-talk, he contrives to persuade them that he has so much to say that the very volume of his ideas must inevitably crowd out any coherence of expression. What he really amounts to, at least on this occasion, is an intellectual soft-shoe dancer executing his intricate steps on a wet featherbed. He has not only obviously bitten off more than he can chew but, fuller to the point, has ostentatiously chewed more than he has bitten off. The consequence is that his mouth performs some very violent motions and that what comes out of it approximates zero.

This is one case where seeing is not believing, since what goes on on the stage would drive Ripley to drink. There is, for example, a parallel between the death of a clinical laboratory rat from cancer and the death of a young woman from a lover's kiss, which certainly is going to scare the day-lights out of a lot of hitherto amiable girls, dammit. There is, for another — or at least it sounded that way to me — the idea that unanticipated rain is somehow associated with the transmigration of souls, which in the best interests of coming generations caused me charitably to go out and buy a heavy raincoat. And there is also, after two hours of complicated psychical argument, the announcement that the moribund heroine, who is already dead from tuberculosis but doesn't seem to know it and who has visions, is

proof of an after-life. In other words that, if a human being is dead, a second death will indicate that she did not die either the first time or the second but that she is still in some mystical way alive, a philosophy obviously derived from Joe Cook's *Four Hawaiians*.

It is all reminiscent of a day years ago when Harry Kemp, the Greenwich Village poet, came into Mencken's and my editorial quarters and declared that he had written a one-act play which we would be proud to buy and publish in our magazine. "What's it about?" we asked. "It's about a tornado that destroys an oil-well," he informed us. "A flood follows, and then a thunderstorm, and a horse breaks loose, upsets a lamp, and sets fire to a house in which an old grandmother is nursing her baby. A distracted cow dashes madly into the burning oil-well and the old grandfather jumps up from his wheel-chair and chases the cow half a mile down the road into another house that has been uprooted by the cataclysm. In the uprooted house lives a family of ten and in which three of the children are dying of starvation. The horse reappears in the uprooted house and seizes up the children in its teeth, but at that instant is killed by a bolt of lightning."

"What happens then?" we politely inquired.

"Then," proclaimed the author, "he tells her that he loves her!"

I will not accuse de Hartog of having plagiarized Kemp's masterpiece, since he undoubtedly never heard of it, but he certainly in some way has managed to duplicate very closely its technical lucidity.

Whenever any such play shows up, it induces people who are bored stiff by it nevertheless flatteringly to remark that it took courage to produce it. What it takes, of course, is not courage but dumbness. Which recalls the late Helen Westley, who for many years was a member of this same Theatre Guild's board of directors. On the Guild's opening nights, the grand old girl, begauded as ever like the gypsy queen in a 1890 comic opera, always deposited herself in a seat on the aisle in one of the rear rows of the theatre. On the various occasions when her Guild associates

saw fit to put on plays like this de Hartog exhibit, it was her pleasure to hail me on my way out at the first intermission and loudly to assure me that if I didn't think the play was a polecat I was crazy. At the second intermission, she would lean over as I went up the aisle and beamingly yell, "See, I told you! It's getting even lousier!" And at the evening's end she would grab me by the arm and gleefully shout, "My God, did you ever see anything like it?"

I miss her.

Adding to the cramps of the present offering was the prehistoric kind of direction, by Paul Crabtree, which made the actors face the audience when they were addressing each other, bend wistfully over the various articles of furniture, throw open doors to determine whether anyone was eavesdropping, and recite such haplessly undeleted lines as "the stars are like cold diamonds." The acting of John Archer as a Dutch medical scientist resembling one of the pugs in *Is Zat So?*, Ruth Ford as the female zombie with a face made up with three parts borax to one part tomato juice, and Sam Jaffe as a combination Freud and Swedenborg in an Elbert Hubbard wig and the usual intellectually baggy pants, was, to put it chivalrously, at least appropriate to the script.

FOR LOVE OR MONEY. NOVEMBER 4, 1947

A comedy by F. Hugh Herbert. Produced by Barnard Straus for the rest of the season's performances in the Henry Miller Theatre.

PROGRAM

NITA HAVEMEYER	Vicki Cummings	MRS. TREMAINE	Paula Trueman
MRS. EARLY	Maida Reade	MR. TREMAINE	Kirk Brown
QUEENIE	Elizabeth Brew	BILL TREMAINE	Mark O'Daniels
WILBUR	Grover Burgess	PRESTON MITCHELL	John Loder
		JANET BLAKE	June Lockhart

SYNOPSIS: *The entire action takes place in the drawing-room of Preston Mitchell's home at Port Washington, Long Island during December, 1946. Act I. Scene 1. Late Monday afternoon. Scene 2. Several hours later. Act II. Scene 1. The following morning. Scene 2. The following Sunday. Act III. Scene 1. Later that evening. Scene 2. The following night.*

Director: Harry Ellerbe.

THE PLAY may be a rubbishy affair and unworthy of the attention of fastidious criticism, but there is nevertheless one thing about it that appeals to a man of my advanced years. My satisfaction, indeed my rapture, is derived from its theory that very young and very beautiful girls entertain an admiration and even passion for us old boys which they do not share for our youthful rivals, and are ready at the snap of a finger to drop the latter where they stand for the overwhelming joy and privilege of sharing our exciting company. Not, mind you, that I believe it for a moment — a conviction perforce imposed upon any old fellow with any experience in the matter — but it is pleasant and soothing dope just the same. I can't imagine any finer escape to be found in the whole theatre. It may make the young of the species derisively laugh their damned heads off, but with me it's grand. There I sit, my features enveloped in a superior smugness, and in my gratified mind's-eye vision myself, despite my sciatica, arteriosclerosis and

hundred or so other malaises, amorously pursued by the choicest of ingénues, soubrettes and débutantes, all of an inordinate loveliness, and all rich. There I sit and bask in the fancy of innumerable voluptuous affairs of the heart with such fair young creatures, all of whom literally force themselves upon me despite my gruff reluctance. There I sit and have the vicarious time of my life, at least until a little sense unwelcomely intrudes itself upon me and makes me wish that playwrights like this Herbert would before they manufacture such moonshine study plays like Davies' *A Single Man* and van Druten's *The Mermaids Singing* and learn to appreciate that what they imagine is flattering to us old goats would, if it were a fact, bore the life out of us in no time. But, being what they naïvely are, they continue peddling their May-December mush year upon year. So far as I remember, the business began as far back as the last century with Barrie's *The Professor's Love Story*. And it has since spread its pall in dozens of plays like *Daddy, Longlegs*, *Accent On Youth*, *Apple Of His Eye*, etc.

Jenkins, my slippers and my pipe.

In this version, the young one again one night rushes into the house of the middle-aged hero (he is a celebrated actor this time instead of the more usual playwright or novelist) to escape the attentions of the customary automobile Lothario. It is, of course, raining and the hero of course again instructs her to remove her wet clothes and to encase herself in one of his dressing-gowns, lest she perish of pneumonia. While thus presumably semi-nude, the little one is subjected to the habitual successive entrances of the divers neighbors, along with the lady who has been the hero's inamorata, and all, naturally and with the proper amount of shock and indignation, place the worst construction on the situation. All, that is, save the neighbor's usual young son, who is sentimentally fetched by the little one and whose fetch seems for the time being to be reciprocated. But it is the elderly hero, obviously, who really attracts the little one — she finds him so understanding, so generous, so decent, so awfully handsome — and since, as she says in the face of his magnanimous remonstrances, he

will only be one hundred when she is an old lady of forty or so, a connubial embrace logically terminates the evening.

The author, being a product of the Hollywood moving picture studios, relates the plot in the literary style indigenous to those ateliers and further mechanically falls back upon scenes and situations out of the dusty dramatic catalogue. There is, for example, the one from *David Garrick* in which the hero pretends to be a bounder in order to disillusionize his young admirer. And the one paraphrased from *Clarice* in which, to the same end, he tears up the papers on which she has been sincerely and hopefully working. And the "What's your name?" curtain tag from *Salomy Jane*. And the man's mistress who pops in upon his tryst with his new love from *The Voice Of The Turtle*. And a half dozen others.

In the role of the little heroine, despite dialogue that imposes upon her comments that all men are beasts, that a woman above all dislikes pity, and that one feels very drunk after a sip of brandy, a novice named June Lockhart is excellent. She manages a part that might easily be repellently cute with no cuteness whatever; she reads her dishonest lines with a convincing honesty; her expression is fitted admirably to the role's varying moods; and she is personable and all in all the best comedy ingénue the season has uncovered. And she has been a screen actress at that. As the elderly lover, John Loder, another screen actor, on the contrary proves decisively that stage acting is beyond him; his performance enjoys all the attributes of a shop window dummy other than the latter's ease in fancy clothes. Vicki Cummings is, as always, agreeable in her usual role of the other woman. The rest are neither the one thing nor the other, excepting Mark O'Daniels, as the wooing young man, who runs Loder a neck-and-neck race for the bad acting cup.

Two questions occur to me. In the first place, why do the authors of these love and sex comedies so generally select trite titles like this *For Love Or Money*, which must already have been used many times and which doubtless is

to be found in the "Plays For Amateurs" catalogues by the dozen? Why don't they occasionally take a cue from the French and hit upon something a little more lively? For instance, something like Georges Feydeau's *But Don't Go Around Without Your Clothes*; Achard's *Can You Plant Cabbages?*, Attier's and Rieux's *Lobster American Style*, Avoir's *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*, Brioux's *The Cockchafers* (*Les Hannetons*), Coolus' *Mirette Has Her Reasons*, etc.

Secondly, when these Hollywood authors with eyes solely on the box-office concoct their plays, why don't they go the whole hog and even more shamelessly than at present, if a little more sagaciously, resort to some of the oldest and apparently safest items in the American hokum tradition? As it is, they take altogether too many unnecessary chances and frequently fail to swindle the theatre out of so much as a dollar. (It was only June Lockhart that saved this specimen from prompt collapse.) I suggest to them, for example, that, when next they write a play, they make sure that it contains a bell other than merely door or telephone. Do not ask me why, but the records of the American stage for the last sixty or more years indicate that nine out of every ten plays with such bells figuring conspicuously in them have been box-office successes. The bells may be of almost any kind — ship, locomotive, fire, church, or what not — but whatever they are they seem to be instrumental in fascinating audiences. To enumerate the bell plays and shows that have kept the ticket-sellers busy would call for an entire chapter. Since any long list of names is inevitably tiring to a reader, I put down just a few: *Eight Bells*, *A Midnight Bell*, *The Still Alarm*, *The Bells*, *A Bell For Adano*, *The Old Homestead*, *The Eternal City*, *The Sunken Bell*, *Under The Gaslight*, *The Heart Of Maryland*, *The Miracle*, *The Chimes Of Normandy*, *The Monks Of Malabar*, *The Yeomen Of The Guard*, *Via Wireless*, *The Two Orphans*, *Ten-Minute Alibi* . . . These will suggest many others. Moreover and on the other hand, unless my statistics are faulty, not even one failure among the hundreds of failures in the last ten sea-

sons had cagily safeguarded its chances through the inclusion of any such tintinnabulum as figured in the hits above noted.

There is still another variety of play that appears to be born under a lucky star. That is the play which has a railroad train in it, particularly a railroad train crawling by night across the backdrop. So far as memory serves, I can recall only one play produced in many years, *Fulton Of Oak Falls*, which had such a crawling train and yet foundered. The successes generally would choke a chapter equally with the bell plays. They have ranged from *Bedford's Hope* to *Forty-five Minutes From Broadway*, from *The Ninety And Nine* to *The Fortune Hunter*, and from *The Fast Mail* to *Life*. Their number is legion. And just as *Fulton Of Oak Falls* has been the only failure containing the spectacle of a miniature train crossing the rear scenery, so if I am not mistaken have *Casey Jones* and *Heavenly Express* been the only failures containing a locomotive and/or train of more ample size. And in the case of musical shows, the only fizzle that comes to mind is Orson Welles' *Around The World*. All sorts of others from *The Defender* to Olsen and Johnson's *Sons o' Fun* have been profitable. Even the plays that have shown the inside of railway coaches seem for the most part to have been prosperous. Reflect, for example, on all such as *Excuse Me*, *Twentieth Century*, *A Little Journey*, etc. As to musicals, the sole exception that occurs to me at the moment, aside from the Welles show, was *St. Louis Woman*.

It all surely does not appear to make much sense, but it is not sense that we are talking about. What we are talking about is the show business. And since the show business is probably more increasingly eccentric than anything else under the sun, the authors may be warned that, though ship bells have been good for the box-office in the past and while they still possibly may be, it seems to be advisable nowadays to keep the ship or boat scene itself out of a play and to sound the bells from the wings. Again, please do not ask me why, but in later years, aside from the revival of *Outward Bound*, every new play, excepting only three,

containing a ship or boat scene has lost money. To give but a short list, I ask you to recall in this regard *A Passenger To Bali*, *False Dreams*, *Farewell*, *The Innocent Voyage*, *Lifeline*, *The Rugged Path*, *Wingless Victory*, *Sea Dogs*, *Blow Ye Winds*, *A Ship Comes In*, *Western Waters*, *How To Get Tough About It*, *The Gentle People*, *Between Two Worlds*, *Battleship Gertie*, *Hidden Horizon*, and *This Time Tomorrow*, among many others. The only deviations from the rule were *Excursion*, *Skipper Next To God*, and of course *Mister Roberts*. It may be otherwise with musicals, at least in the case of a revival like *Show Boat* — though even that did not make any money in its substantial New York run — but it is hard to tell, since *Memphis Bound* and various others proved to be duds.

To sum up, it might be a wise bet for any of the Hollywood hacks who have recently lost money on their plays to fashion a script in which a bell prominently figures and in which at one point or another an illuminated papier-mâché train moves by night across the backdrop. It probably will not matter much whether the play is good or bad. Even if the critics dislike it, the public, if the records count for anything, will prize it. Just to make doubly sure, however, let the hacks work in a scene in which a detective closing in on his unaware prey leaves his tell-tale hat in the room upon making a momentary exit. If the play inconceivably then should fail — the hat business at least is, as always, sure to get enthusiastic critical notices — I shall be prepared to believe that I have wasted innumerable years of theatrical experience and shall get busy at once in instructing the hacks to convert the script into a certain and resounding success by adding to it that character who regularly enchants audiences: a genial drunk.

THE FIRST MRS. FRASER. NOVEMBER 5, 1947

A revival of the comedy by St. John Ervine. Produced by Gant Gaither for 39 performances in the Shubert Theatre.

PROGRAM

NINIAN FRASER	<i>Lex Richards</i>	ALICE FRASER	<i>Emily Lawrence</i>
MABEL	<i>Hazel Jones</i>	MURDO FRASER	<i>Kendall Clark</i>
JAMES FRASER	<i>Henry Daniell</i>	JANET FRASER	<i>Jane Cowl</i>
PHILIP LOGAN	<i>Reginald Mason</i>	ELSIE FRASER	<i>Frances Tannehill</i>

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *Late afternoon.* Act II. *Two weeks later.* Act III. *Six months later. The action of the play takes place in Janet Fraser's apartment in Knightsbridge, London. The time is the present.*

Director: *Harold Young.*

MR. ERVINE describes the heroine of his comedy as an extremely attractive and appealing woman. While I have few objections to the manner in which Miss Jane Cowl plays her, I am nevertheless afraid that I do not react to the role as I probably should under normal circumstances. It is not my fault that I do not; it is Miss Cowl's. Shortly before the play opened, she gave out a newspaper interview. In the interview, she confided to the world — I quote literally — that "I perspire like a fish-wife." The horrified interviewer, Mr. Rice, was about to exclaim, "Oh, no, Miss Cowl, not that!" when she reaffirmed her statement. "Oh yes, I do!" she emphasized. "This summer my peasant side came out. I perspire like a fish-wife."

I tried professionally to forget it while reviewing the actress' impersonation of Ervine's supposedly captivating heroine, but I couldn't. Instead of the charming and desirable character the author had intended, what I kept visioning in my confusion was a creature damp with sweat, and not very appetizing. If only, I said to myself, Miss Cowl had informed the interviewer that she perspired like, say, a mint julep or even a Chihuahua's nose, it would not

have been so disturbing. But a fish-wife, no. I couldn't take it.

There is not too much illusion left in the theatre as things stand these days, and actresses of Miss Cowl's position should not help to destroy what little remains. But somehow a sufficient number of them seem bent on doing that very thing. Doubtless under the impression that frankness is both disarming and the mark of a winning personality, they interview themselves out of all those romantic qualities, however theoretical, which the theatre has a right to expect of them and which it must sustain if it is to prosper. The Duses and the Ellen Terrys, the Maude Adamses and the Ethel Barrymores and their counterparts have served wisely in their ex-officio persons the theatre's main business of cloud-borne fancy. They have not de-winged the stage of its romance by expounding to reporters on fallen arches and gallstones, on a taste for raw meat and garlic, or on the excessive personal excretion of liquid by their sudoriparous glands. Yet it is just such confidences that some of our actresses, who should know better, nowadays spread swinishly in the public prints. And with what result? With the result that, unless the roles they appear in are of a relevantly unpleasant nature, an audience has trouble in accepting them for the women their playwrights have sentimentally created. It is not easy, as audiences have duly indicated, to read in the papers an actress' admission that she eats like a horse, has an awful time with dandruff, and is never so comfortable as when she is slopping around in an old Mother Hubbard and on that same evening to visualize her as the object of a passionate and overwhelming admiration on the combined part of a duke, a poet, a one-time lover of Lily Langtry, and maybe even a dramatic critic.

My colleagues have written that the Ervine comedy has dated badly in the eighteen years which have passed since its original production. They are right; it has. But it was not less dated at the time of that production. Its story of the wife abandoned by her husband for another and younger woman, of his tiring of the latter, and of his con-

trite return to the old fireside had already then long since been told in one form or another by numerous playwrights like Maugham in England, Bahr in Austria, Capus in France, Bracco in Italy, Buchanan in America, and yet others. And their plays in turn were all familiar thematic echoes of the very much earlier Sardou's *Divorçons*. Ervine's characters, in addition, had already sprouted goatees when his play first appeared. The vain Scot husband unconscious of the value of his wife was seen to be Barrie's John Shand. The understanding wife was, among two dozen others', Bahr's Mrs. Arany. The faithful old admirer of the wife was Pinero's Cayley Drummle. And the Other Woman shown up by the wife was, among four or five dozen others', Eugene Walter's Eleanor Lathrop. The sense of Old Home Week continued in the situations: the scene in which the wife and other woman confront each other, the one in which the returned husband displays his jealousy of his former wife's admirer, the other one in which the wife pretends that her humbled ex-spouse's protestations of love are too late, etc.

Though the writing is here and there satisfactory, the play suffers further and for the greater part from, first, its author's indignation in certain directions and, secondly, his rather cumbrous doses of sentimentality. An example of the latter is the scene in the last act wherein the husband wistfully allows that he is growing old and wherein then the wife whom he is re-courting enters into a sweetly tristful monologue on the profound beauty of facial wrinkles and, generally, the wonderful visual improvements wrought by age. The indignation in turn centers chiefly and collaterally on the utter worthlessness of the young. When it comes to youth, Ervine sees red. His ire is so indiscriminate and consuming that he would in all likelihood hiss June Lockhart off the stage, throw empty beer bottles at Johnny Lujack, and believe that *Love For Love* and *The School For Scandal*, written by Congreve and Sheridan in their twenties, were stinkweeds compared with *The First Mrs. Fraser*. There have been other dramatists who have regarded the young of the species with some mis-

givings. But they have realized that indignation is the thief of persuasion, not to say of sense, and have said their piece with a convincing irony or a facetious charity. Ervine did not learn and has not learned his lesson. After he has had at youth for some time with hammer and tongs, there isn't an octogenarian in his audience who doesn't feel like rushing out of the theatre and giving a big hug to the first little cutie he sees on the street, supplemented by a couple of dollars to her kid brother.

Miss Cowl's performance, accompanied by her customary wealth of manual byplay which suggests the gestures of accomplished acting less than the comportment of a frantic deaf-mute, is a cross between the light comedy interpretation of the role earlier offered by the matchless Marie Tempest and the tenderly lugubrious interpretation subsequently offered by Grace George. It is not always clearly resolved, though the net effect serves the play well enough. As the husband, Henry Daniell seems to be in some doubt of the character until the later portions of his performance, when he manages to get it in hand. His Scotch accent, however, only contributes further to my old discomfort when within earshot of any such speech. I am, I must state, far from prejudiced against many things Scottish. I am, in fact, and long have been an admirer of Scotch whisky, butterscotch, Hazel Scott, Scot tissue, Scott Fitzgerald, hopscotch, Scotch terriers, Sir Walter Scott, Scotch woodcock, Antonio Scotti, and the popular ditty, "My Man's Scot Rhythm." My prejudice is simply against Scotch dialect on the stage, and even then it has been inoperative in the face of a play as good as *A Highland Fling* or a show as good as *Brigadoon*. More often, however, it prevents me, and not, I think, without cause, from cottoning to the kind of play or show in which the characters pronounce "did not" as if they were Pullman porters announcing the evening meal, "have" as if it were food for horses, and the other parts of English speech as if seven out of every ten of its words were spelled entirely with *r*'s. Just why such Scotch dialect is supposed by authors and producers automatically to influence us to believe that its mouthpieces are lovable and

charming, or at least quaintly entertaining, I dinna ken. When I, for one, have to listen for two hours to a lot of characters talking as if their tongues were dentists' drills encased in fur, I am even prepared to enjoy the prospect of turning on the radio dial to Lew Lehr, God have mercy on us all. It is for this reason that various plays which have met with favor from others have failed in fascination where I have been concerned. *Bunty Pulls The Strings*, which everybody else seemed to admire, did not do a thing to me. Neither did *The Little Minister* and some of Barrie's other burr-mills. And so, also, with *Beside The Bonnie Brier Bush*, *Kitty MacKaye*, etc. Maybe I need some scoto-therapy.

Of the other members of the acting company, Reginald Mason, with his experience in polite comedy, was far the best.

Though the drawing-room setting by Charles Elson had a reasonable look about it, the stage direction by Harold Young was less drawing-room than pool-parlor.

EASTWARD IN EDEN. NOVEMBER 18, 1947

A play by Dorothy Gardner. Produced by Nancy Stern for 15 performances in the Royale Theatre.

PROGRAM

AUSTIN DICKINSON	John O'Connor	EMILY DICKINSON	Beatrice Straight
LAVINIA DICKINSON		EDWARD DICKINSON	Edwin Jerome
	Beatrice Manley	DR. CHARLES WADSWORTH	
MAGGIE	Kate Tomlinson		Onslow Stevens
LUCY PLUM	Barbara Ames	MISS SIMPSON	Mary Jackson
HELEN FISKE (Hunt Jackson)		MARTHA DICKINSON	
	Emma Knox		Robin Humphrey
SUSAN GILBERT	Penelope Sack	THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON	
GERRY HOOD	Don Peters		John D. Seymour
BEN NEWTON	Ernest Gaves		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The Dickinson parlor, Amherst, evening, 1852.* Scene 2. *Pastor's church study, Philadelphia, 1854.* Act II. Scene 1. *Same as Scene 1, Act I. Afternoon, several years later.* Scene 2. *Same. December afternoon, a year later.* Scene 3. *Same, three days later. Night.* Scene 4. *A cottage.* Act III. *Dickinson parlor, Amherst, Sunday afternoon. Twenty years later.*

Director: *Ellen van Volkenburg.*

THE HERO of *Brewster's Millions*, you may recall, had desperate difficulty in squandering a fortune within a stipulated space of time. Had he consulted me, I might have instructed him how to do it with the greatest of ease. All he would have had to do was to invest it in a play about a famous poet. When it came to plays about famous statesmen, soldiers, harlots, composers, kings, queens, or even actors, he would, I might have counselled him, be taking too big a chance, since altogether too many of them have made rather than lost money. But the books show that he could readily have solved his problem and gone happily bankrupt by backing one about a celebrated rhymester. In the last half-century or more, only two out of all the many plays dealing with any such figure have turned a noticeable profit at the box-office. One was *Omar The Tent-*

maker whose central character was Omar Kháyyám, and that one succeeded mainly because of Guy Bates Post's lascivious spouting of the popular illustrated drugstore calendar's "A loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and thou," to say nothing of on the score of what was advertised to the yokels as "A stupendous, spectacular, daring production." The other was *The Barretts Of Wimpole Street*, which took not one but 2-poets-2 to put it over and which of course benefited enormously from the presence of the popular favorite, Katharine Cornell, as one of them.

All the rest that I can think of would have been right up Brewster's alley. When he got through with them, he would have been lucky if he had both his shoes left. There was, for example, Bobby Burns and *Robert Burns*, which lasted for just one performance. There were Poe and *Edgar Allan Poe*, *Plumes In The Dust*, and *The Raven*. There was the Bard of Avon in a number of bogies, among them *Will Shakespeare* and *Second Best Bed*. There were Keats and *Aged 26*, Chatterton and *Come Of Age*, Byron and *Bright Rebel*, and also Villon in *If I Were King*, which did not make any real money until tunes were added to it and it became a musical comedy under the title, *The Vagabond King*. And there were various others, all of which would have driven Brewster to borrow a quarter for lunch.

Poets in the theatre, it appears, should be heard, not seen. And even if they are merely heard and not seen, the commercial results are not luxuriant, as Susan Glaspell found out with her play about Emily Dickinson, *Alison's House*, and as Martha Graham learned in another direction when she staged a talking ballet about the same poetess. Emily in particular, indeed, has never fared too well in the theatre. Not only in the case of the two exhibits mentioned did the Treasury Department's agents find it unnecessary to hurry around and scrutinize the producers' income tax returns, but another called *Brittle Heaven*, by the Messrs. York and Pohl, was forced to cry quits after only twenty-three performances.

Now comes still another Dickinson play and it, as well, has turned out to be Brewster-bait. It is not that it is a

wholly undeserving play; one or two things in it are commendable. It is simply that, as with the other failures, whatever they were like, it is apparently hard to interest the paying public in a distinguished lute-strummer unknown to nine-tenths of it and which, even if it had heard of her, would still be considerably less interested in her than in such of its great versifying pets as Robert W. Service, Joyce Kilmer, and Edgar A. Guest. With a public, in short, the majority of which on any radio quiz program would lose its last chance at the Buick if asked to distinguish between Emily Dickinson and Babe Didrikson, any such play has to stand or fall on its interest as one about a largely fictitious character. And the fact appears to be that most minnesingers, including Emily, whatever share of romantic quality they may have possessed, somehow do not seem to be prehensile enough to be regarded apart from themselves and to serve effectively as heroes or heroines of fiction. Once you have named the exceptional Villon and Byron, you will, I believe, be put to it to think of a poet anywhere nearly as dramatically interesting as, say, Jeeter Lester, Lightnin' Bill Jones, or even the Winslow boy.

The present offering has to do with the ill-starred love of Emily and the Rev. Dr. Charles Wadsworth, a family man, and of his highly moral retreat when he feels that things may go too far. When, twenty years later, he returns, he learns that her tender passion for him has never faded and has found its release in verse which she has held close to her bosom. It is commonly argued that such plays are too literary, and hence not to the general public's taste. The fact of course is rather that they are not literary enough. They take a literary figure and, except for allowing him to quote fragments from his works, by and large subject him and particularly those around him to that routine economy of stage dialogue which often resembles literature infinitely less than it does an *Author Meets The Critics* radio program.

The play was scarcely helped by the performance of Beatrice Straight in the leading role. Miss Straight seemed to have just two expressions: a wide-eyed smile to register the

character's spiritual rapture and a sudden erasure of it to register an inner melancholy. And it was not only not helped but devastated by a dream scene, introduced by stereopticon clouds on a scrim curtain, which in the way of wholesale sentimentality made *Peter Ibbetson* look in comparison like *The Lower Depths*. The whole was to be summed up as a two and one-half hour sighing discourse on the immortality vested in love between an actress archly hopping and pit-a-patting around in a hoopskirt and an actor in clerical garb standing apart and gazing at her admiringly. And the evening was further intimidated by the kind of stage direction which had the household maid intermittently flounce off the stage indignantly slapping her apron, which made the sound of sleighbells identical with that of the bell on the Dickinsons' front door, and which caused the chief characters rapturously to fasten their eyes on the windows leading to the garden every time they were called upon to mention birds, flowers, the sun, the moon, or the joy of living.

Donald Oenslager's period settings were basically good examples of realistic designing but were contradicted by mirrors conventionally soaped to eliminate the reflection of stage lights, electric-logged fireplaces, pea-greenish Maeterlinck moonlight, and single candles that suddenly flooded the stage with a powerful illumination. The play itself in turn periodically violated its poetically spiritual atmosphere with such Broadway dialogue stereotypes as "You are in a strange mood today," to say nothing of with an audience's disturbing reflection that it was at bottom little more than the old Hall Caine-Henry Arthur Jones-Robert Hichens holy man-earthly woman materials attributed to a pair of factual persons and dressed up with chit-chat about Emerson, Henry Ward Beecher, and the *Atlantic Monthly*.

Various additional things, Brewster might have been assured, usually conspire against the success of such a play as this *Eastward In Eden*, or any other kind which, like it and regardless of quality, does not meet the prejudices of the Four Horsemen of the contemporary American drama.

These are, in order, Timeliness, Journalism, Cynicism, and Laughs. The mounts are critics, and the quartet is in large part responsible for much of the desolation in which that drama is finding itself.

Consider the marauders in order. The first, Timeliness, places a premium on the immediate chronological interest of a play's theme. A touching example of the degree to which the attitude goes was to be had in the New York Critics' Circle's award for last year's best play to the negligible *All My Sons*. The citation's most significant line read, "Because of the frank and uncompromising presentation of a *timely* and important theme." O'Neill's infinitely more important and superior *The Iceman Cometh* was dismissed by the awarders because, apparently, timeliness is considered a greater dramatic asset than timelessness. The O'Neill play deals with the spiritual needs of mankind unending; the Miller play with the corrupt war-time sale of some defective airplane parts and the consequent killing of a number of army fliers. It was therefore esteemed to be the finer specimen of dramatic art. If it was not esteemed principally on that score, we must believe that the awarding critics consider the novice Miller more expert in dramaturgy than the O'Neill who, by the same critics' paradoxical consent, is the foremost dramatist of the American theatre; that, for all its freely admitted faults, *The Iceman Cometh* is not more expert in character drawing than a play whose chief figure owns a factory that "looks like General Motors" yet who dresses, looks, acts and talks like a foreman's helper and who lives in a cheap little frame house with no servant to help his ailing wife run it; and that, because the O'Neill play consumes four hours and is not as compact as the two and one-half hour Miller play, the Miller play presumably for that reason is *ipso facto* more admirable in artistic economy than even the uncut four-hour *Hamlet*.

The veneration of timeliness is also clearly to be perceived in the case of other recent plays and has been instrumental, at its most preposterous, in according high critical favor to such a paltry example of dramatic writing as

State Of The Union, which carries timeliness to the extreme of altering nightly its references to the newspaper political headlines. A glance at last season's exhibits offers additional evidence of the tendency. Though *On Whitman Avenue* produced some critical qualms in other directions, the timeliness of its theme — injustice to the Negro — met with almost unanimous critical endorsement. In the same way, the opportuneness of the various themes of *A Flag Is Born*, *Temper The Wind*, *The Big Two*, *The Whole World Over* and other such poor plays was greeted in the main with warm commendation, even if the plays themselves here and there were greeted with less. The same held true of experimental misfires like *The Wanhope Building*, *The Great Campaign*, *O'Daniel*, et al. And Sartre's *The Flies* got such notices partly because of its philosophical identification with the moment as had not been read locally since *Watch On The Rhine* similarly inflamed the critical enthusiasm some half dozen years ago. In the present season, plays like *Skipper Next To God* and *The Respectful Prostitute* continued to emphasize the general propensity.

All this, of course, is a consequence of the Second Horseman's journalistic attitude toward the drama. With minor exception, the drama most often depends for its life and livelihood not upon critics who view it as an art but upon newspaper reviewers most of whom regard it — perhaps properly and correctly in the nature of their jobs — through what they imagine are the eyes of the majority of their readers. It is these readers whose tastes they hope to serve and those tastes, they please themselves to believe, are primarily for passing entertainment or, at the highest, "serious" drama with something of a "message." The message, they further allow themselves to think, is best and most acceptable when it has to do with something in the immediate minds of their readers and which has been lodged there by the news of the day.

There have been and there are still the exceptional daily reviewers who seek to operate on more independent and loftier principles. But they are not the popular ones and

their opinions are accepted mainly by the minority of their readers who are biased in favor of drama of some repute. And even they at times can not resist entirely the pull of what they are shrewd enough to realize is reader appeal. Compromise is accordingly not always beyond them. The more popular reviewers, on the other hand, are those who bear steadily in mind that the great majority of their readers have no use for the finer drama, that they can not be persuaded to attend it even if the reviewers endorse it, that it is therefore the wiser course to accept the standards of the majority, and that in doubtful cases it is best to side with that majority's prejudices, real or imaginary. What all this naturally leads to is the reviewers' either quick or gradual surrender to the popular view of drama, again whether real or imaginary, and their acquisition of pride in being thus established as bell-cows of the larger share of the theatregoing public. The end-product of the attitude is the public's acceptance of critical guidance which is no guidance at all but simply an advance reassurance that its tastes are what they properly should be. It is, in brief, a leadership in reverse.

One of the fruits has been those tabulated critical scores, published by theatrical publications like *Variety* and *Billboard*, which lay unction to the vanity of reviewers who are nominated leaders by virtue of their having picked the greatest number of box-office successes regardless of merit. The pleased reviewers seemingly never stop to reflect that the box-office hits would scarcely have become hits had they themselves not helped them to become so. They do not pick the hits, as the scores appear to show; by their praise they make them hits. If their critical standards had been worthier, they would not have endorsed many of the plays and, lacking endorsement, the plays would in fair chance have been failures. And the reviewers, consequently far from being cocks of the Broadway walk, would be very much sounder and more estimable critics, and the state of the drama improved and elevated.

The play that boasts authentic quality thus often has

hard sledding, and the best that generally may be hoped for is that the play which rests half-way between real quality and compromise will get by. In the usual run, we find that plays which refuse compromise and, whatever their place in the sun, make an honest effort in the direction of dramatic worth, suffer at the hands of most of the reviewers and are doomed. I offer, in example, a few such in the last five or six seasons: *The Beautiful People*, *Walk Into My Parlor*, *Our Lan'*, *Magic*, *Hello Out There*, *Run, Little Chillun*, *Outrageous Fortune*, *The Innocent Voyage*, *South Pacific*, *A Highland Fling*, *Trio*, *The Overtons*, *Dark Of The Moon*, *The Deep Mrs. Sykes*, *The Assassin*, *A Sound Of Hunting*, *The Mermaids Singing*, *Lute Song*, *The Fatal Weakness*, *As We Forgive Our Debtors*, and *The Old Lady Says "No!"*

An extension of the journalistic attitude toward the drama may further be observed in the supreme Pulitzer prize nonsense. The committee of newspaper editors who bestow the annual award allowed at their 1947 meeting that not only was O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* not to be considered as worthy of any mention, but that neither it nor any other play of the year was deserving of the great honor that in previous years had been heartily conferred upon such masterpieces of the dramatic art as *The Old Maid*.

The Third Horseman, alias Cynicism, is the prime critical mountebank of the quartet. His adopted fury is sentiment. By nature soft as a fresh egg, he has persuaded himself, with visible strain, that a stern opposition to sentiment of any kind, except possibly in musical shows, will mark him out as a tough and superior mentality, not to be tricked by that feminine thing called the heart. Give him a play, however charming, that does not at least once relieve its emotional and imaginative delicacy with the ejaculation of a "son-of-a-bitch" and he makes a critical muscle. He is hardboiled, like little Lord Fauntleroy's cuffs.

His hypocrisy works its damaging will upon various

plays that deserve better. For example, one such as van Druten's engaging comedy, *The Mermaids Singing*. The theme, you may remember, had to do with a middle-aged married playwright and an attractive young girl who admired him to the point of urging herself anatomically upon him. His reluctance to enter into an affair with her, despite strong temptation, because he well appreciated all the nuisance and trouble it would get him into, constituted the body of the play, which was thoroughly adult, sharply perceptive, and witty. The Third Horseman, however, rode into it lashing right and left on the ground that it was altogether too sentimental in moral tone. Just where it was too sentimental in any tone was difficult to make out. Though it may have seemed so superficially, it was the exact opposite. The hard sense and cold calculation of the man in avoiding the sex relationship had about as much sentiment as double entry bookkeeping. Yet the overwhelming fear of being considered sentimental led the reviewers to discern a moral tone in the man's abnegation.

What is here being written is plainly not intended as an argument for the sentimental in drama. Far from it. The argument is simply that where and when the sentiment is sound, the blanket indictment of it on the part of posturing critics becomes worse than ridiculous. And what is equally ridiculous is the confusion of sentimental values often found in these same critics. There is probably no play of any quality essentially more sentimental than Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma*. Yet though Shaw is at no pains to conceal the fact, the play is digestible to the critics on its author's general reputation, scarcely well-founded, for cynicism. There is on the other hand probably no play of any quality essentially more unsentimental than Saroyan's short *Hello Out There*. Yet, because Saroyan has the general reputation for crying into his beer, it is decried in various critical quarters for its alleged softness.

Sentiment seems somehow curiously to be associated in such critics' minds with playwrighting hacks or with spongy dramatists like Barrie. Nor is it always a question of good

and bad writing, as those looking for an easy way out may contend. Where a more shamelessly sentimental play than the *Swanwhite* of the misanthrope Strindberg, than the *Hannele* of the realist Hauptmann, or than the *Peer Gynt* of the revolutionary Ibsen? Where, contrariwise, less sentimental and tougher plays than such hack works as *The Great Magoo*, *Maid In The Ozarks*, and *Catherine Was Great*?

The Fourth Horseman demands laughs above everything. He can conceive of nothing as entertainment if it does not succeed in causing him to open wide his mouth and emit noises of an hyena volume. The art of the drama to him is a succession of simian antics. He goes to the theatre, he says firmly, to be amused, and he is evidently not to be amused by anything that aims a bit higher than his belly. He is to be recognized in several ways. "The play" — whatever it is — "is sadly lacking in comedy," he writes. "The laughs are widely scattered," he deplores. "The humor, so far as it exists, is hardly robust," he complains. "There are a few chuckles here and there," he allows, "but otherwise a sad dearth of merriment." And so on. One of the few occasions on which he permits himself an excursion into the higher critical altitudes is in the instance of Shakespeare, whose clowns, he pontificates, are no longer funny.

No one not completely an ass protests against laughter in the theatre. But no one but a complete ass admires it to the exclusion of almost everything else. The Fourth Horseman's admiration, furthermore, is critically indiscriminate. Anything, so long as it unbuckles his cackles, is due for his congratulations. There is small distinction between a *Born Yesterday* on the one side and a *Volpone* on the other. He is at once the interlocutor and end-man in his own critical minstrel show. Wit, he seems to maintain, is for the culturally snobbish; belly laughter is the ticket. And this belly laughter is chiefly the kind that follows the miscegenation of Billy Watson and the drama. We thus get from him, when duly gratified, such frequent and familiar testimonials as — I quote literally — "A laugh riot," "A com-

edy smash," "A wow," "It brought the house down," "The roars shook the ceiling," "One long, grand guffaw," "An uproarious show," "A hilarious ticket's worth," etc.

So far does the prejudice in favor of laughs go that there have actually been plays which have succeeded largely on the score of a single thunderous midriff reaction. This has been true since the evening, years ago, of *Turn To The Right*, with its "Has anyone in this town got a hundred and twenty-five dollars?", to *Dark Eyes*, with its Negro butler's "I wish to seize this opportunity to thank you ladies for the beautiful necktie you gave me," and beyond. It was the last minute insertion of the line, "She comes from one of the first families of Pittsburgh — as you enter the city," that partly saved the day for an old Channing Pollock show. And in more recent years the old-time Fourth Horseman's sons have indited extravagant praise of such dramatic clap-trap as *Brother Rat*, *What A Life!*, *Junior Miss*, *Over 21* and the like simply, it is to be assumed, because the shoddiness of the plays has been camouflaged with an occasional similarly pleasing joke. Moreover, quality or no quality, it is significant that a large proportion of the critically endorsed successes in the last ten years have been the comedy laugh shows: *You Can't Take It With You*, *Yes, My Darling Daughter*, *Having Wonderful Time*, *Room Service*, *Susan And God*, *Amphitryon* 38, *Bachelor Born*, *Kiss The Boys Goodbye*, *The Primrose Path*, *Skylark*, *The Man Who Came To Dinner*, *Life With Father*, *The Male Animal*, *George Washington Slept Here*, the venerable *Charley's Aunt*, and *My Sister Eileen*. Along with *Arsenic And Old Lace*, *Blithe Spirit*, *Janie*, *Kiss And Tell*, *Harvey*, *Dear Ruth*, *O Mistress Mine*, *Born Yesterday*, *Happy Birthday, Years Ago*, *John Loves Mary*, *Mister Roberts*, the comedy revivals like *Burlesque*, the *Brother Rat*, *What A Life!*, *Junior Miss* and *Over 21* earlier noted, etc., etc.

To repeat, unnecessarily: there is assuredly nothing to be said against laughter as such. Even the slapstick and the bladder have their virtues. But one prefers generally to believe with Victor Hugo that comedy, when mingled with the drama, is better if it contains something of a lesson and

has something of a philosophy. If that be the highbrow attitude, it is still what the critical attitude should painfully bear in mind. The comedy admired by the Fourth Horseman is a lesson in vaudeville and its philosophy that of a circus clown.

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

NOVEMBER 26, 1947

A revival of the Shakespeare tragedy. Produced by Katharine Cornell for 126 performances in the Martin Beck Theatre.

PROGRAM

PHILO	Alan Shayne	AGRIPPA	David Orrick
DEMETRIUS	Theodore Marcuse	POMPEY	Joseph Holland
ANTONY	Godfrey Tearle	MENAS	Martin Kingsley
CLEOPATRA	Katharine Cornell	VARRIUS	Barnet Biro
A MESSENGER	David J. Stewart	VENTIDIUS	Bruce Gordon
DOLABELLA	Robert Duke	OCTAVIA	Betty Low
PROCULEIUS	Charlton Heston	CANIDIUS	Dayton Lummis
IRAS	Maureen Stapleton	EROS	Douglass Watson
CHARMIAN	Lenore Ulric	SILIUS	Charles Nolte
ALEXAS	Oliver Cliff	THYREUS	Robert Carricart
DIOMEDES	Eli Wallach	TAURUS	Gilbert Reade
ENOBARBUS	Kent Smith	GALLUS	Rudolph Watson
MARDIAN	Joseph Wiseman	SCARUS	Anthony Randall
OCTAVIUS CAESAR	Ralph Clanton	EUPHRONIUS	Ernest Rowan
LEPIDUS	Ivan Simpson	DERCETAS	Martin Kingsley

SYNOPSIS: Part I. *The action takes place in Egypt, Italy and Syria.* Part II. *The action takes place in Greece and Egypt.*

Director: Guthrie McClintic.

VARIOUS SCHOLARLY and impressive reasons have been advanced for the hitherto consistent local failure of the lustrous tragedy, but several simpler and possibly more likely ones are often overlooked. The first of these is that it is hard to believe that a public a substantial part of which from adolescence has eccentrically visualized Cleopatra as a cross between the whore of Babylon and a diathermic hoochie-coochie dancer is not disappointed in a play which pictures her instead as a woman to whom love and sex for the most part seem to be interesting chiefly as subjects of conversation and whose expected voluptuousness does not materialize even in speech. Furthermore, as

the late Granville Barker observed, her oral discourse which undoes Antony is far from passionate but drips with sarcasm, wit and malice, which may be said to be scarcely the public's idea of anything auspiciously aphrodisiacal. Still further, imagine the public's sense of swindle when it finds that what it has seen fit to look forward to as a sizzling wrestling match between an Egyptian Theda Bara and a Roman Valentino turns out to be a confabular duet between the two parties who, worse yet, as Barker properly noticed, are never once during the whole play alone together; who embrace each other only two or three times, and then with a largely verbal ardor; who meet at the beginning of the play only to separate; and who on their renewed meeting are depressed out of any potential combustion by the threat of immediate catastrophe.

Dissatisfaction with the play has been no less encouraged by the stage depiction of Antony. The popular conception of the latter, gained from statuary encountered on Cook's Tours, from Shakespeare's own *Julius Caesar*, and in some cases from Shaw's description in *Caesar And Cleopatra*, is of a young man lean, eager, strong, and brimful of loving possibilities. In *Antony And Cleopatra* not only is he far advanced in maturity and its collateral rueful declensions, but he is too frequently cast with an actor who looks as if he were just stopping off wearily in Egypt on his way to the Old Actor's Home and whose only conceivable relations with Cleopatra could be paternal. It is not surprising, therefore, that under the general circumstances the customers should feel that the Nile becomes Nihil, its Serpent Ambrose Bierce's toy snake with the shoe-button eyes, and the fervor, such as it is, the calculated performance of a Little Egypt, with anemia.

The feeling has been customarily further increased by the actresses who have either cast themselves or been cast as the anticipated sensuous and ravishing Queen. I have in my time surveyed a quorum of the girls, and some of them have provided strange spectacles. I have seen no less than three on the Continent who looked so much like Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands that the Antonys, of not

noticeably less avoirdupois, had to approach their inamorata sidewise. I have laid eyes on one or two otherwise estimable English ladies who looked like their Antony's mother and who seemed to be concerned not with his libido but rather over their poor son's predicament with his successive legal mates. And right here in God's country I have — it seems almost since childhood — been edified by a variety of Cleopatras ranging from Wallis to Walsh and from Marlowe and Cowl to Bankhead who played the Temptress as if she were either a Presbyterian lady-in-waiting to herself or an Ilka Chase under the influence of Ann Corio. And when it comes to Antony, I have since the early vision of Robert B. Mantell simultaneously engaged such a succession of beer-bellies and wobbly knees that I was at times not sure whether I was looking at what is supposed to be one of the world's greatest love stories or at a performance of *The Prince Of Pilsen*.

But, together with all this, as if it were not enough, there is still another reason for the play's usual lack of popular success, at least in these more modern times. What with its forty-two changes of scene ranging over the whole map of the ancient period and covering some dozen years, it is much too difficult for the average customer to follow, particularly since most of the different localities under the new scenic dispensation, with its noncommittal blocks, steps, platforms and curtains, look much alike and since it is too dark in the theatre for him to distinguish between them in his program, when and if they are listed, without a flashlight. He has become so used to two- or three-act plays laid in a single place and with curtain drops to indicate the passing of only a few hours that one jumping frantically from city to city, palace to galley, camp to battlefield, and street to plain leaves him bewildered and dizzy. And there remains, finally, the best reason of all, which is that most of the original second and third acts is so anticlimactically tedious that even the most devout of the Bard's followers have trouble in keeping their ears awake.

Miss Cornell is consequently a brave actress to have undertaken another revival of the hoodoo'd work. Considered

apart from its possible financial success or financial failure — which is the only way becoming to criticism — she has mounted an unusually handsome and faithful production and as its prehensile star has devised one of the most neatly intelligent analyses of the part that I have encountered. That she comprehends the role perfectly is clear. What projecting weakness there is lies in those attributes known to cliché criticism as “majesty” and “authority.” Her mind works shrewdly, but her vocal-physical presence frequently contradicts it in the cross-picture of a gentle Candida and a turbulent Dishonored Lady masquerading in Egyptian robes. Godfrey Tearle’s Antony, for a change, is, however, an admirable one, both visually and in execution. The rest of the troupe is of varying quality. Kent Smith, except for a tendency to indulge himself in a set ballerina smile, is a first-rate Enobarbus; Joseph Holland a properly robust Pompey; Ivan Simpson an amusing Lepidus; Ralph Clanton a booming stock-company Octavius; Lenore Ulric a negligible and affected Charmian; and Douglass Watson a fair Eros.

The defect of the whole, well thought out though it is, remains, as generally it does, in the great difficulty of fitting Shakespeare’s broad tapestry into stage walls in such wise that it does not seem to wrinkle. For the wrinkles are in the dramaturgical pattern itself and they destroy any sense of compositional smoothness. Everything considered, Guthrie McClintic has done fairly well by the stage direction. Like Verdi’s *Un Ballo In Maschera*, which similarly has always had poor luck on the stage and which calls for superlative direction to keep it alive, as Virgil Thomson has emphasized, *Antony And Cleopatra* has need of something approaching directorial genius to give it flow and pace where flow and pace are absent from its fabric. Mr. McClintic has not entirely succeeded in the more than merely difficult task, but he has managed a little better than many of his predecessors. What he has missed is the accomplishment of that hovering atmosphere of doomed passion without which the dramatic panorama goes awry. And what he also has failed in is the direction into com-

plete articularity of some of the important speeches, notably the magnificent and all-important opening one, describing Antony, in the mouth of Philo. There is, too, a tendency to formalize the whole which on occasion robs the spectacle of vitality. But, when we reflect on some of the previous direction of the tragedy, his work yet takes on a relatively rosy hue.

I am thinking in this connection of productions like the one staged by Komisarjevsky in London a dozen years ago. Compared with any such miscarriage, the present one seems a veritable masterpiece of stage art. Not only did the Russian indulge himself in such sanguinary mischiefs as altering the play's opening and with only two sets making utterly unidentifiable the locality of most of the scenes, which brought the late James Agate to remark, "I am afraid this production is one of those cases in which what is wanted is a little less imagination and a few more scene-shifters" — not only did Komisarjevsky disport himself thus, but he caused Antony in death so convalescently to shout his farewell that the audience thought for a moment he was about to jump up from his prostrate position and begin the play all over again. There was also the little matter of Madame Leontovich in the Cleopatra role who, with her Russian accent lost upon her fellow-Russian director, brought down the house by reading speeches like "When you sued staying, Then was the time for words" as "Wen you suet staying, Den was de time for wurst," which led Agate to inquire, "What had English tallow and German sausage to do with this Egyptian passion?"

The Cornell presentation's stage settings by Leo Kerz and the men's costumes by John Boyt are deserving of special notice.

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

DECEMBER 2, 1947

A play by Tennessee Williams. Produced by Irene M. Selznick for the rest of the season's performances in the Ethel Barrymore Theatre.

PROGRAM

NEGRO WOMAN	<i>Gee Gee James</i>	BLANCHE DU BOIS	<i>Jessica Tandy</i>
EUNICE HUBBEL	<i>Peg Hillias</i>	PABLO GONZALES	<i>Nick Dennis</i>
STANLEY KOWALSKI		A YOUNG COLLECTOR	<i>Vito Christi</i>
	<i>Marlon Brando</i>	MEXICAN WOMAN	<i>Edna Thomas</i>
HAROLD MITCHELL	<i>Karl Malden</i>	A STRANGE WOMAN	<i>Ann Dere</i>
STELLA KOWALSKI	<i>Kim Hunter</i>	A STRANGE MAN	<i>Richard Garrick</i>
STEVE HUBBEL	<i>Rudy Bond</i>		

HABITUÉS OF THE QUARTER

SYNOPSIS: *The action of the play takes place during the spring, summer and early fall in New Orleans.*

Director: *Elia Kazan.*

THE PLAY, which might well have been titled *The Glans Menagerie*, has been criticized in some quarters as an unpleasant one. The criticism is pointed. But the fact that a play is unpleasant, needless to say, is not necessarily a reflection on its quality. *Oedipus*, *Lear*, and *The Lower Depths*, to name only three out of many, are surely very far from pleasant, yet it is their unpleasantness which at least in part makes them what they are. There is a considerable difference between the unpleasant and the disgusting, which is the designation Mr. Williams' critics probably have in mind, and his play is not disgusting, as, for example, is scum like *Maid In The Ozarks* and *School For Brides*. The borderline between the unpleasant and the disgusting is, however, a shadowy one, as inferior playwrights have at times found out to their surprise and grief. Williams has managed to keep his play wholly in hand. But there is, too, a much more positive borderline between the unpleasant and the enlightening, and he has tripped over

it, badly. While he has succeeded in making realistically dramatic such elements as sexual abnormality, harlotry, perversion, venality, rape, and lunacy, he has scarcely contrived to distil from them any elevation and purge. His play as a consequence remains largely a theatrical shocker which, while it may shock the emotions of its audience, does not in the slightest shock them into any spiritual education.

Eight years ago, at the beginning of his career, Williams wrote a play called *Battle Of Angels*, which closed in Boston after a brief showing. It hinted at his preoccupation with sex in its more violent aspects, which continues in the present exhibit. It also, while not nearly so able a play, betrayed his apparent conviction that theatrical sensationalism and dramatic substantiality are much the same thing and that, as in the present case, one can handily pass the former off for the latter, and for something pretty artistic into the bargain, by gilding it with occasional literary flourishes accompanied by off-stage vibra-harps, flutes, and music boxes. The hanky-panky may work with a susceptible public, but not with the more ingressive criticism. There is a considerable difference between Wedekind and Wedekindergarten. To fashion any such festering materials into important drama it is essential that they be lifted out of life into a pattern larger than life, as, among others, Strindberg and his contemporary disciple, O'Neill, have appreciated. Williams in considerable part leaves them where he found them and deludes himself into a belief that he has made of the gutter a broad sea by now and then sailing in it little papier-mâché poesy boats, propelled by doughty exhalations.

Impressionistically, the play suggests a wayward bus occupied by John Steinbeck, William Faulkner and James Cain, all tipsy and all telling stories simultaneously, and with Williams, cocking his ear to assimilate the goings-on, as the conductor. Critically, it suggests that he is a little deaf and has not been able to disentangle what may be valid from the bedlam and assimilate it to possibly meritorious ends. Theatrically and popularly, however, the re-

sult will surely impress a lot of people, even such as will pretend for appearances' sake to be offended by what they allude to as its "strong meat" and who after seeing it will profess that they long for a breath of fresh, good, clean glue.

Like a number of his contemporaries, Williams seems to labor under the misapprehension that strong emotions are best to be expressed strongly only through what may delicately be termed strong language. I am not, you may be relieved to know, going to take up again the already over-argued question as to whether such language has any literary justification. I am as tired of the discussion as undoubtedly you are. But, justified or not in certain cases, it seems to me that in this specific instance he has at times used it not because it is vitally necessary but for purposes of startle and because his dramatic gifts do not yet include the ability to achieve the desired effect without easy recourse to such terminology. His writing — to fall back on a description I have used before — sometimes sounds altogether too much like a little boy proudly making a muscle.

The play centers on a Southern school-teacher whose youthful marriage ended in tragedy when her homosexual husband committed suicide, who has vainly sought penitence in miscellaneous sex, and who has become an incurable neurotic with delusions of grandeur. It develops her amatory life with her sister's husband and with the latter's crony. And it ends with her mental disintegration and deposit in an asylum. That it holds one's interest is not to be denied. But it holds it much as it is perversely held by a recognizably fixed prize-fight or a circus performer projected out of what appears to be a booming cannon by a mechanical spring device. It is, in other words, highly successful theatre and highly successful showmanship, but considerably less than that as critically secure drama.

In this general view of the play, I hope that no one will suspect that I am subscribing to such definitions as Jerome's "Ugliness is but skin-deep; the business of Art is to reveal the beauty underlying all things." Such sweet sentiments, though generally accepted as true, are much too

broad and sometimes faulty. The revelation of fundamental ugliness and depravity has been known to be not only the business of art but even occasionally its triumph. The form and style and manner of the revelation may be beautiful, but the revelation itself is not. A better definition might be that the business of art is to reveal whatever is basically true, whether beautiful or ugly, in terms of the highest æsthetic competence. The ugliness in Williams' play may in the definition of the Jeromes be only skin-deep, but the ability to prick deeper into it and draw from it the blood drops of common humanity, and in them a true count of dramatic art, is absent. It scarcely throws one off critical scent to quote in the program verse, by Hart Crane, about "the broken world," "the visionary company of love," and "its voice an instant in the world." It is not enough to substitute the ingenious stage magic of lights and music for the equally seductive but more definitely powerful magic of poetry. For what still mutinously forces itself upon one in this tale of a prostitute who would envelop hideous reality in the anodyne of illusion and supplant the world of pursuing lust with one of pure love is, save in a few valid scenes, the impression of a Pirandello theme dramatized by a hopeful aspirant to dramatic lyricism and which periodically — and I am not being as facetious as you may think — converts its characters into rampaging approximations to Harpo Marx.

Contributing greatly to the external successful aspects of the play are admirable direction by Elia Kazan and a uniformly excellent acting company in which, supported by Marlon Brando, Karl Malden and the rest, Jessica Tandy in the role of Forever Streetcar gives one of the finest performances observed locally in several seasons. Also helpful is Jo Mielziner's variant of his scenic design for the same author's *The Glass Menagerie*, though one may wonder how he reconciles an acutely realistic lavatory with the rest of his fancifully imagined and dreamlike interior of a dwelling in the Vieux Carré.

TRIAL BY FIRE. DECEMBER 4, 1947

A documentary play by George H. Dunne. Produced by the Blackfriars' Guild for 16 performances in the Blackfriars' Guild Theatre.

CAST

Marc Snow, Will Marshall, Paula Mayer, Thomas Roberts, Charlotte Nachtwey, Clarence Rock, Charlynn Wright, Valerie Cavell, John Flower, John Young, Evelio Grillo, Nappy Whiting, Tom O'Connor, Walter Thompson, Helena Price, and John Michael.

Director: *Albert McCleery.*

FATHER DUNNE, S.J., has based his episodic play, a protest against racial intolerance, on an actual case involving the death of a Negro family in a fire which devastated their home in southern California. Using the court records, he presents them quite as literally as Dreiser did in *An American Tragedy*. The effect at odd moments is what he hoped for, but the play covers ground already often thrashed in the theatre and hence overly familiar and it is further weakened by elementary dramaturgy that fails to discriminate between the necessary and the needless, which latter predominates. In brief, as the cliché goes, a sincere effort, but sincerity, as the cliché also goes, is scarcely in itself enough to foster merit in otherwise limited dramatic competence.

CARIBBEAN CARNIVAL. DECEMBER 5, 1947

A calypso musical revue by Adolph Thenstead and Samuel L. Manning. Produced by Adolph Thenstead for 11 performances in the International Theatre.

PRINCIPALS

Pearl Primus, Josephine Premice, Claude Marchant, Pamela Ward, Alex Young, Charles Queenan, the Duke of Iron, the Smith Kids, Curtis James, Peggy Watson, Padjet Fredericks, Fred Thomas, the Trio Cubana, Eloise Hill, Dorothy Graham, and the Caribbean Calypso band.

Director: Samuel L. Manning.

ADVERTISED AS "the first calypso musical ever presented," the show, like the Caribbean island entertainments in general, has a deal of life in it, but the life is all of an aimless piece, as is that in a puppy or rubber ball, and, though liveliness there unquestionably is, it consequently seems to be static and to revolve 'round and 'round in the same circle, like a squirrel in a rotating cage. The native dances are doubtless authentic, but since most of them seem to consist in impassioned efforts simultaneously to dislodge the sacroiliac and rupture the genital parts and since the dusky ladies and gentlemen who are the parties thereto proudly display what after all look like everybody else's navels, the evening scarcely progresses. Especially and further since the background for most of the dances presents the usual lopsided palm trees and smear of blue sea and since standing in front of the painted canvas are the customary black girls with their shirts coyly dropped off their left shoulders and balancing either tall jars or flower-pots on their heads. The calypso rhythms and jungle drums, like ice-skating shows and novels about Nell Gwynn, after a short time also become so monotonous that one finds one's mind wandering. In my case, it began to wander so far afield before the show was three-quarters of an hour old that it never came back to the stage proceedings. In view of which uncritical

fact, there is nothing I can do to give you a fuller account of what went on and will mortify myself, and probably you, by offering some samples of my mental peregrinations.

While the gentleman who calls himself the Duke of Iron had at me with a series of calypso songs that all sounded exactly alike, I was waywardly thinking that one of the most impressive differences between American and English sex comedy is that in the former the hero and heroine finally go to bed together, sentimentally, and that in the latter the hero avoids it, wittily.

While Claude Marchant and the dancers were executing one of the routine voodoo numbers, I meditated that it is a weakness of the great majority of modern comedies that their endings are too neatly resolved and tied up with pink ribbons. Life and the better comedies, I said to myself, are not like that, as everyone except the playwrights seems to be aware. Life has a way of leaving things unravelled, and the more observant comedy writers have that way as well, as, among others, Schnitzler has attested in *Anatol*, Henry Arthur Jones in *The Case Of Rebellious Susan*, Brieux in *The Incubus*, and Molnár in *The Guardsman*. Most playwrights may be obliquely reminded that there remains a possibly greater virtue in Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony* than in the completed score of *Toplitzky Of Notre Dame*, in the unfinished *Faust* of Goethe than in the fully rounded *I Gotta Get Out* of Joe Fields, and maybe in even Dickens' uncompleted *The Mystery Of Edwin Drood* than in the exactly unravelled *Duet For Two Hands* of Mary Hayley Bell.

While Pearl Primus was remorselessly chasing her navel back and forth on the stage, I wondered why those of our producers who are fetched by propaganda plays and who usually pick out the kind that make a soapbox blush for itself are not aware of one, and a very good one with a likely contemporary slant, written more than four hundred years before the birth of Christ by a fellow named Aristophanes. Its title: *The Acharnians*. Its plot: A good-natured countryman is driven from his village home by enemy invasion. Though a peace to end the war is possible,

his government dallies for so long over details that he gets good and sick of the delay and in disgust dispatches a personal messenger to the enemy to effect a separate peace for himself and his family. The messenger is successful; the enemy government pleasedly sends him back with lots of booze for a mutual ratification of the truce; and the old boy gets a magnificent celebrating edge on and rosilily returns to his home — just in time to participate in the feast of Bacchus.

While the so-called Smith Kids, boy and girl, were indulging in familiar island ditties, the alcoholic attributes of the aforesaid feast turned my thoughts to speculating on the advance that our theatre has managed in at least one respect. No longer as in past days, I reflected, is stage direction in plays of fantasy of the bogusly imaginative kind which sought to top fancy with fancy by making the actors behave as if they had been out on a six-day binge with Maeterlinck and were still in the hangover state where they were not sure whether they were themselves or Pease-blossom. The alcoholic metaphor similarly and gratifyingly no longer includes the sort of staging which the war-refugee Russian and German directors were fond of visiting upon certain specimens of their native dramatic art. It was their idea, as will be painfully recalled, that authentic dramatic stylization was to be accomplished simply by placing upon a platform a pair of large screens that looked as if they had been up all night drinking, were in the incipient stages of delirium tremens, and were about to fall under the table, and by inserting between them groups of actors instructed to comport themselves as if they were seized alternately by attacks of epilepsy and paralysis. Even had the plays themselves been half-way acceptable, their effect would still have been demolished by the directors' transmutation of the characters into actors so hammy that one could not stifle one's chuckles on beholding them popping out their eyes like Peter Lorre, gesticulating like so many French traffic cops, leaping and bounding about the stage like the late Lew Morrison's Mephistopheles, and then

suddenly relapsing into a semblance of Nance O'Neil rigor mortis.

While the jungle drums were dum-dumming and the dancers once again enthusiastically running after their navels, it occurred to me that among the most intolerable dramatic actors are those elocutionary relics from another era who indulge themselves throughout a play rolling dice with their voices.

While Josephine Premice was calypsoing herself blue in the face, I evolved this definition: Dramatic criticism is the craft of superimposing a critic's logical prejudices on the emotional prejudices of a dramatist.

While Miss Primus was again voodooing her umbilicus, I thought that the theatre in its character of a mere purveyor of amusement sometimes profits very much more from bad acting than good. A play so dreadful in every particular that its entertainment quotient is nil may occasionally be made the stuff of considerable jollity by acting even more atrocious than the play itself. Where good acting would only point up its awfulness, really terrible acting contributes a measure of hilarity to it. Some of the most thoroughly amusing evenings I have spent in the theatre have been at bad plays even worse acted. For example, *The Love Call*, *Boudoir*, *House Of Doom*, *A Strange Play*, *They Walk Alone*, *Brother Cain*, and, by all means, *Curtain Call*, with the memorable performance by Guido Nadzo. The operators of the old river showboats, of the tank-town Tom companies, and, later, of such travestied melodramas as *The Drunkard* weren't fools. They knew that the money of customers who howl with mirth at moribundous acting is just as good as that of customers who find satisfaction in only the better grade.

While still more calypso was lulling my brain, my thoughts turned to the writing racket as it currently operates in the land. The writing racket, I mused, is one of the nation's most fruitful confidence games. For every competent and honest writer there are at least twenty or thirty who, by substituting pen, paper and ink for the more

obvious three shells, swindle the public into providing them with a fancy living. The moment one comes upon a scribbler, let us say, who in seeming doubt writes, "Was it not So-and-so who once said so-and-so?", one should switch one's watch to another pocket. The writer knows perfectly well that it was So-and-so who said it, since one may be sure that he looked it up, and his implication of lack of certainty is intended to suggest that his head is so full of all the scholars in the world who may possibly have said something faintly similar that he can not at the moment for the life of him unravel his enormous store of recollection and knowledge.

The quote boys, most of whom belong to the was-it-not mob and chief of whom are critics of one sort or another, have also long been in the soft money. Their especial pitch is saying nothing, or at best very little, on their own, and bequeathing to themselves a handsome air by promiscuously hijacking the wit and wisdom of others, always cautiously selecting their multiple victims from the deceased lest there be yelps from their cabbaged contemporaries. One may spot the general nature of their little game in something that goes like this:

"Georg Brandes remarked of Wagner, 'His music has the quality of incandescent thunder.' I thought of this as I listened last night to *Siegfried*, of which Huneker wrote, 'Its length may be likened to two miles of unsalted pretzels.' As I sat there, there occurred to me, appraising the opera, the words of Swinburne: 'The sounds of the sea in tumult swirl about one like melted cannons.' And was it not Brunetière, or was it Matthew Arnold? — it might, indeed, even have been Louis XIV — who said, 'Art is most negative when it is most positive.' Nonetheless, the performance of *Siegfried*, though it might slightly have ruffled the æsthetic sensibilities of Racine, who allowed that 'the defects of opera are not always the defects of virtue,' would, it is likely, have met with the approbation of Kotzebue, who once observed, 'I am always, I notice, pleased by what pleases me.'"

Then there are what may be designated the reader chis-

elers. Their fetch is the ingratiation of themselves with their customers by implying that the latter are already privy to all that is recondite in the world, and on easy and off-hand terms with it. If they are not flattering their readers with "as you must [never "may"] surely recall" or "as you certainly are already wholly aware," they are in operation with the "as you need not be tolds," "as you will readily recognizes," and "to repeat what you probably are already fully familiar withs."

Close at the heels of such come the heavy modesty and the foreign-word sharpeners. The heavy modesty boys are even easier to identify than the foreign-word swindlers. Their technique consists in a foxy depreciation of themselves in the hope of making the reader cotton to them the more greatly and thus, by putting him off his guard, make the fleecing of him a simple matter. Their literature teems with such phrases as "your humble scribe," "your would-be guide," and "your ink-stained wretch." Periodically it embraces such wiles as "if I may take the liberty," "you will, I hope, pardon me if I venture timidly to suggest," "if I do not again, alas, fall into error," and "without the slightest desire to foist my dubious opinions upon you." Nor does it craftily overlook a liberal injection of the editorial "we," an intermittent squirt of "my readers, if any," and a sufficient embroidery of "these dim eyes," "this shaking hand," "these old bones," and "this fast-failing memory."

In the foreign-word aggregation are to be found the lesser variety of college professors and others who know no language but English, and little of that. The members never under any circumstance condescend to write simply *glow*, *junction*, or *spirit*, say, but always and invariably *élan*, *rapprochement*, and *esprit*. And that is just the beginning. *Mirabile dictu*, *affaire*, *raconteur*, *imprimis*, *qui vive*, *tout le mond* and *pourboire* are all over the sheet giving things a tone. And so, instead of good, plain English are *Dei gratia*, *beau idéal*, *cacoëthes scribendi*, *en rapport*, *fin de siècle*, and *fille de joie*, to say nothing of good old *simpatico*, *coup de grâce*, *mise en*

scène, Sklavenmoral, Homo sapiens, idée fixe, amour propre, femme fatale, vieux jeu, ancien régime, enfant terrible, etc.

Next in the line-up are the descriptive atmosphere confidence men. It should take the prospective victim only a moment to recognize them, since they generally give themselves away in the very first paragraph. If a gray mist isn't spread like a ghostly blanket over the bleak moor, the sun is setting like a ball of crimson fire over the rippling bay, and if neither the gray mist nor the ball of fire are in operation the elms bordering the village street are drooping in the late, silent twilight or the great house is standing lonely on the far hill like a forsaken, blinking owl. For the victim somewhat slower in catching on to the ways of the racketeers, there are a sufficient number of other clues, the chief of the give-aways being their inability to mention anything — whether a two-by-four room, a minor fall of rain, or even a one-horse-town drugstore — without elaborately atmospherizing it up with a Sears-Roebuck catalogue, a second-hand dose of Joseph Conrad, or the report of a half dozen motion picture location scouts. If it is the two-by-four room that occupies them, they are ready with a realistic, minute description of every last thing in it, from the wallpaper to the small crack in the ceiling and from the board in the floor, just one inch from the pine door painted pale blue, that creaks to the other board in the floor, just two inches from the door painted pale green leading to the bedroom, which is papered in pale red, that also creaks. And so from the slight drizzle of rain, which atmospherically wets up at least four pages, to the hick drugstore, which usually technicolors up six or seven — all the story's characters apparently meanwhile being off on vacations in Atlantic City — and which seems to be as peculiarly full of detail (the word "microcosm" comes in here) as the biggest department store in New York or Chicago.

The simile boys sometimes operate independently but more often work with the atmosphere mob. With them, everything is like something. Not simply like something,

but very fancily like something. Thus, a girl's hair is never, say, like taffy; it is like melted amber flowing softly over her shoulders like a gentle Springtime cascade. Nor are a man's eyes just like cold steel; they are like twin rapiers piercing everything they meet with steely, wounding ripostes.

The rhythm freebooters frequently work the same side of the street. With only a little "and" up their sleeves, they have been sailing big for years, ever, indeed, since Richard Harding Davis showed them the way to turn it into wistful money. Where someone else, Heaven forbid, might write: "Over there on the far horizon lies the island of Santa Luciano, its palms swaying under the tropical stars; those lights you dimly see are the harbor lights of Blanaña; the waves of the Caribbean wash the sandy beaches; the moon bathes the coral coast; the trade winds ruffle the wildflowers into a warm perfume" — where, as I say, someone else might, again Heaven forbid, put it that way, the rhythm boys sell the reader by turning on the "and" phonograph: "And over there on the far horizon and where lies the island of Santa Luciano and its palms swaying under the tropical stars, those lights you dimly see are the harbor lights of Blanaña, and there the waves of the Caribbean wash the sandy beaches and the moon bathes the coral coast and the trade winds ruffle the wildflowers into a warm perfume."

There are, as well, the taste gentlemen, whose especial racket consists in trying to win the reader by insulting him. This is known in the trade as the akamarakus of attraction by repulsion. To the taste gentlemen, the taste of everybody else is something terrible. It stinks. So right from the shoulder they tell them. Their taste is low. They are bourgeois. They are peasants. They are clods. They should learn. Otherwise, God help the artistic future of America! The boys are out to save Culture from the rabble, the canaille, the riff-raff and the rag-tag-and-bobtail — at the noble self-sacrifice of twenty cents a word.

And, finally, there are the grifters whose racket is what passes for so-called "tough mug" lingo. In harrowing ex-

ample, a specimen of the kind of telephone conversation which their characters merchant:

"Is zat youse, lallapalooza?"

"Yeah, it's me, brother; is zat you, big boy?"

"Yeah, it's big boy himself in poisen. Whatya doin' to-night, bitcherino?"

"Nuttin', big boy; what's boilin'?"

"You said it, babe; meet me to th' corner of Broa'way and Fifty-foist at seven."

"O.K."

"O.K.?"

"O.K."

And the calypsoing and navel heavings still went on.

GALILEO. DECEMBER 7, 1947

A biographical play by Bertolt Brecht, adapted by Charles Laughton, with incidental music by Hanns Eisler. Produced by the Experimental Theatre, Inc., for 6 performances in the Maxine Elliott Theatre.

PROGRAM

CURTAIN BOY	Allen Martin	SUPPORTING MONK	Pitt Herbert
GALILEO	Charles Laughton	LITTLE MONK	Don Hammer
ANDREA	Michael Citro	CLAVIUS	Taylor Graves
SARTI	Hester Sondergaard	BELLARMIN	Lawrence Ryle
LUDOVICO	Philip Swander	BARBARINI	Rusty Lane
PRIULI	Fred Stewart	INQUISITOR	John Carradine
SAGREDO	John Straub	ANDREA	Nehemiah Persoff
VIRGINIA	Joan McCracken	GUISEPPI	Donald Symington
FEDERZONI	Dwight Marfield	BALLADE SINGER	Harris Brown
SENATOR I	Sidney Bassler	BALLADE SINGER'S WIFE	Elizabeth Moore
SENATOR II	Frank Campanella	BALLADE SINGER'S DAUGHTER	Iris Mann
PRINCE	Larry Rosen	A MONK	Sidney Bassler
PHILOSOPHER	Thomas Palmer	DUKE OF FLORENCE	Earl Montgomery, Jr.
LORD CHAMBERLAIN	Harry Hess	INFORMER	Warren Stevens
ELDERLY LADY	Mary Grace Canfield	MATTI	Philip Robinson
A SCHOLAR	Frank Campanella	SACRISTAN I	Taylor Graves
A MONK	Leonard Bell	SACRISTAN II	Leonardo Cimino
INFURIATED MONK	Werner Klemperer	TOWN CRIER	Philip Robinson
OLD CARDINAL	Wesley Addy		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Galileo's study, Padua, 1609.* Scene 2. *The great arsenal of Venice.* Scene 3. *Galileo's study. January 10, 1610.* Scene 4. *Galileo's new house, Florence.* Scene 5. *The Collegium Romanum, Rome. 1616.* Scene 6. *Cardinal Bellarmine's palace, Rome.* Scene 7. *Garden of the Florentine Ambassador, Rome.* Act II. Scene 8. *Galileo's house, Florence. 1623.* Scene 9. *The market place of a small town in Italy. All Fools Day. 1632.* Scene 10. *The Medicean palace, Florence.* Scene 11. *The Vatican. 1633.* Scene 12. *Garden of the Florentine Ambassador, Rome.* Scene 13. *A country house near Florence. 1637.*

Director: Joseph Losey.

THE EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE, so-called, got its second season under way with a play that had already been shown on the West Coast without any tokens of experimental or critical acclaim, and understandably, since it is a heavily contrived and dramatically static chronicle of the life and tribulations of the celebrated physicist entirely lacking in any distinction. That it was chosen simply because Charles Laughton was willing to come east to act in it is, I fear, the only explanation. There was some severe criticism of the local organization for thus casting the play with an actor who has made a box-office name for himself in the moving pictures, as there was for casting another such picture name, John Garfield, in the next forthcoming production. As for myself, I can think of nothing less deserving of critical attack than any such hazardous experiment of determining whether former actors who have gone to Hollywood can still do anything remotely approaching acting on the dramatic stage. At the same time, however, it does not escape me that there is a suspicious box-office flavor to any experimental enterprise that takes cautious refuge in such luring marquee film lights.

Though, as noted, there may be some experimental value in gambling on the possibly remaining competences of one-time stage actors who for years have been antick-ing before the cameras, it is difficult to make out any experimental value whatever in the Brecht play. Similar plays, and much better ones, have been produced in the Broadway theatre, and the productions of them also have often been much better. I sometimes wonder, indeed, at most of this experimental business as it has been conducted in these parts. It too frequently seems to be the idea of the experimenters that any play is a worthy experimental item if only no professional producer has been willing to put it on. It similarly seems too frequently to be their idea that because no such producer has seen fit to put it on it is therefore something that must be possessed of a strange and hidden merit. And if such a play, which

should properly be staged in a more or less conventional manner, offers an opportunity to piscator it almost out of recognition with lantern slides, loud speakers, off-stage juke-boxes and topsy-turvy scenery, they grow delirious with delight.

Much of the local experimental undertaking in the last twenty or more years is an after-growth of the arrival on these shores of refugee producers and directors from the wars, both I and II. A few of these Central Europeans and Russians were men of imagination and talent, if sometimes too greatly given to freakishness of a wild and woolly order. But many more were second-raters without any real ability who attempted to conceal their lack of it in an approach to the stage that was even wilder and woollier and which was incompetent, immaterial and irrelevant to the plays upon which they imposed it. Yet their influence on local youth in the small, off-Broadway theatres was marked, and though that youth advanced in years and percolated into the larger theatres it unfortunately did not advance in any discrimination between what might conceivably be valid in the foreign staging and what was unmistakably fraudulent and silly. As a consequence, we were confronted from time to time by imitations of these alien charlatans which not only grieved the judicious but which grieved even more the plays, whether good or bad, that were made to suffer from the apery.

Even at this late day the lesson still has not been learned, and plays which would be relatively more acceptable if staged honestly and simply are made ridiculous by staging and directing them as if they were the progeny of stereopticon machines, radios, moving pictures, amplifiers, forum platforms, church choirs, Greek burlesque shows, and the warden and matron of an institution for the mentally unbalanced. Incidental music is introduced with no warrant other than that it covers up the directors' inability to suggest elsewhere a sense of dramatic flow. Steps leading into the auditorium and causing actors whose proper place is on the stage to migrate down them into the audience are resorted to to achieve an intimacy that sound and

knowledgeable direction might incorporate into the play itself. And various other such tomfooleries convert the occasion less into one of drama than one largely indistinguishable from a vaudeville show plus only a plot. While but a few of these excrescences are visible in this presentation, the few tend not to assist but further to discompose it. And, as heretofore, they impress the spectator as being arbitrarily introduced solely in the hope of deceiving him into a belief that there is more in the scanty script than meets the ear. They are, in short, to any reputable staging what a monkey is to an organ-grinder: a catchpenny distraction from the wheezing contribution of his instrument.

The Brecht play, which has discernibly been maneuvered by Laughton into a vehicle suitable to his histrionic eccentricities, centers on Galileo's historic conflict with the church. Its one relative merit is that it does not, as might have been expected, take pride in drawing a parallel to truth's modern conflict with authority. Though in this instance there might have been some dramatic reasonableness, the play wisely prefers to rest in mere implication. This, surely, is a welcome change from the current tendency of our playwrights to draw parallels between the past and present which often goes to such strained lengths that, if it continues, we may anticipate plays which will demonstrate the similarity of Noah's troubles with the Ark to John Ringling North's with his circus, to say nothing, probably, of others attesting to the considerable identity of the suppression of some of Voltaire's writings and the censorship of Twentieth Century-Fox's movie, *Forever Amber*.

Whether Mr. Laughton could still act appeared to be a moot point, with the upholders of the negative not lacking in number.

THE GENTLEMAN FROM ATHENS

DECEMBER 9, 1947

A play by Emmet Lavery. Produced by Martin Gosch in association with Eunice Healey for 7 performances in the Mansfield Theatre.

PROGRAM

COUSIN VINCENT KILPATRICK	MIKE RYKOWSKI	Lou Polan
Watson White	CONGRESSMAN ANDREWS	Leopold Badia
MISS MARY KILPATRICK	CONGRESSMAN BORGEN	Ed Latimer
Ethel Browning	CONGRESSMAN HARNELL	Arthur Jarrett
MORGAN KILPATRICK Alan Hewitt	CONGRESSMAN (MRS.) STRINGLEY	Elsie May Gordon
LEE KILPATRICK Edith Atwater	RADIO AND NEWSREEL CREWS	Frank Rowan
DANIEL Creighton Thompson		Oliver Crawford
BIG ED LAWRENCE Gavin Gordon		Leonard Auerbach
HON. STEPHEN SOCRATES		
CHRISTOPHER Anthony Quinn		
IGOR STEPENOV Feodor Chaliapin		
NEWS REEL DIRECTOR		
Lorance Kerr		

SYNOPSIS: The entire action takes place in the drawing-room of Kilpatrick Hall, one of the great old houses of Virginia. The year might be any year coming up. The time covered is from January to June. Act I. Scene 1. New Year's Eve. Scene 2. A few mornings later. Act II. Scene 1. Several months later. Scene 2. A few days later. Act III. Five days later, early morning.

Director: Sam Wanamaker.

THE AUTHOR is one of God's most enviable creatures. He is so rich in optimism that he believes that a politician who is constitutionally so crooked that a dill pickle looks to him like a pretzel may be influenced by an ethical young woman and a portrait of George Washington to abjure dishonesty on the spot and to turn as straight as an archbishop. I am, as everybody knows, a man imbued with such consummate faith in most things that I even go to the extreme of believing in the virtues of holy matrimony, raw carrots, and dramatic criticism, but I have

something of a tussle with myself when it comes to Mr. Lavery's miracle. He is, of course, not the first playwright who has presented a devious character brought by personified rectitude to turn honest. But he is, unless memory is playing me a dirty trick, the revolutionary first to present the chameleon as a politico. Brieux, forty years ago in *La Foi*, known to English-speaking audiences as *False Gods*, offered the shifty fellow as one originally destined for the cloth who turns rationalist but who finally surrenders to the people's will to believe. And before and since then we have had all kinds of characters ranging from hypocrites and swindlers to thieves, jailbirds and prostitutes who have been induced either by a single virtuous man or woman or by both multiplied by a communal figure to lead or at least plan to lead the better life. But if among them all a playwright has ever gone so far as to include a political rogue, I must have been at a somewhat more reasonable burlesque show that night and missed the sensational event.

It is, however, one of the generally accepted rules of critical conduct that an author is entitled to treat of anything or anybody in any way he chooses, and that only the manner and style with which he manages the treatment are the critic's business. So I suppose, being a union member, I shall arbitrarily have to swallow Lavery's politico as I should have to swallow some other playwright's theory that Thomas Jefferson was the father of Jenny Lind. You have to be open-minded in this job. But, though I am willing to abide by the union's by-laws, I'll be hanged if I am going to do it without repeating that not only has Lavery thrown his hat into the ring as a hitherto undreamed of idealist but, in my private opinion, has achieved the remarkable feat of simultaneously talking through it.

And so we come, perforce and obediently, to his treatment of his extraordinary idea. I should like to report that it is so novel, witty and accomplished that the idea becomes digestible, but I fear that I can't. His uncouth and shady politician is Charles Hoyt's Maverick Brander out

of *A Texas Steer*, minus Hoyt's satire and closer knowledge of the breed. In the character there is further no trace of the understanding and humor of the politician in Benjamin Woolf's earlier *The Mighty Dollar*. The upright young woman, once again in this case a secretary, who reforms the politician, is the same character who has reformed dozens of characters not politicians in as many plays. And the business of getting the goods on a political opponent in the shape of a scandal in the latter's ex-officio life is the old ravioli out of a quorum of past, dead plays, among them William C. de Mille's *The Woman*, produced by Belasco back in 1911.

These are just a few intimations of Mr. Lavery's lack of inventiveness. If you cry for more, there is the proud, aristocratic young woman who shrinks from the vulgar hero at the outset but gradually perceives his innate nobility, rejects the suitor of her own class, and takes him for mate. How often you have encountered that character, I have neither the time nor the patience to dredge up. There is also the gentle old Negro butler who has been with the old Southern family since General Lee as a boy used to come around to the kitchen door for a handout of cookies, along with the prim old aunt who girlishly succumbs to the vulgar hero's boyish charm. Additionally in the mishmash is the airily indolent brother of the heroine who is given to drink and whose philosophy is that work is a form of exercise not to his elegant taste. And the irascible old male relative of the family who stamps disagreeably out of the drawing-room but relents long enough to pause briefly in the doorway and condescend an amiable remark in parting. And, among a lot of others, the stereotyped indignant Congressmen who storm into the room and apoplectically tangle themselves up in protestations. There is another old friend as well, the gangster henchman of the crooked politician, but here the author has alleviated the rubber-stamp with some likely humor and, amusingly acted by Lou Polan, the character takes on the only relative freshness in the entire gallery.

In the role of the political scoundrel who turns cherub,

the screen actor, Anthony Quinn, making his first appearance on the stage, does very well in spite of direction by Sam Wanamaker that in all probability would have made Salvini look like Butler Davenport. Mr. Wanamaker's handling of the players and the stage throughout, indeed, is the kind that does not seem to have made up its mind whether the play is drama, comedy, farce, or a series of blackout sketches. His idea of the punctilio in its various phases is furthermore, to say the least, strange. He causes the household servant to cross in front of his mistress when they leave the drawing-room; he has the aristocratic heroine introducing her aged aunt to the political bounder instead of vice-versa; he seems to forget that at a large reception it is not an unconventional practice to serve a little food and drink; he has a bottle of champagne standing upright on the buffet for the whole three or four months of the play's duration; he permits odd characters periodically to enter the supposedly choice quarters without being announced; and the general atmosphere is allowed to suggest less that of "one of the great old houses of Virginia" than of one of the great old speak-easies of West Forty-ninth Street.

In the cast is one Gavin Gordon, a tall, skinny mime in trousers of such modish 1935 width that Falstaff would get lost in them. I read in the program that Mr. Gordon in other days was big romantic shakes on the screen opposite Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich. Mr. Gordon here plays the heroine's suitor with a fixed, fatuous, show-girl grin that would drive any romantic reaction out of a gnu.

The public could not take any part of it, and the play expired where it stood.

ANGEL IN THE WINGS. DECEMBER 11, 1947

An intimate revue with music and lyrics by Bob Hilliard and Carl Sigman, sketches by Hank Ladd, Ted Luce and the Hartmans. Produced by Marjorie and Sherman Ewing for the rest of the season's performances in the Coronet Theatre.

CAST

Grace and Paul Hartman, Hank Ladd, Viola Roache, Johnny Barnes, Elaine Stritch, Nadine Gae, Peter Hamilton, Robert Stanton, Eileen Barton, Patricia Jones, and Bill McGraw.

Director: John Kennedy.

THE DIFFERENCE between a revue and an intimate revue, of which this is an example, is about one hundred and sixty thousand dollars. A revue is an expansive affair in which at least twenty thousand dollars of the two hundred thousand dollar investment are spent on the bird costumes which the show-girls wear in the number in which they represent perfumes, ten thousand dollars on the silver sequined silk curtain that draws apart in fancy folds, and twenty-five thousand on the suit for damages brought by the sketch writers whose stuff was not used. An intimate revue, on the other hand, is one in which several pieces of cut-out cardboard painted pink or green serve as scenery; in which what money is left over is spent on a gauze curtain with autumn leaves painted on it through which the male and female dance couple are beheld in an arty Nijinsky-Pavlova pose and when it lifts come on and do a snappy fox-trot; and in which most of the clothes look suspiciously like those the actors have been wearing at Lindy's.

An intimate revue usually also contains a master of ceremonies who appears during the scene changes and passes the time while the stagehands are moving off the pink cardboard cut-out and moving in the green one by

commenting facetiously on the economical aspect of the show, as well as on the advanced age and decrepit condition of the male star. This is supposed to work in reverse and make the audience so merrily oblivious of the truth of the remarks and so hospitably disposed toward the show that it will think it cost at least half a million dollars and is really something pretty terrific.

Many of these intimate revues are not merely intimate but altogether too presumptuously familiar. When one comes along that is a bit less ancestral than usual, it seems so much better than it actually is that one is to be pardoned for writing about it as if it were what it isn't. This *Angel In The Wings* is largely a case in point. It is not that it is good; it is simply that it is better than expected.

The reasons for the comparative endorsement are a drily humorous conférencier in the person of a comic named Hank Ladd, a pair of fresh and lively sketches about a radio breakfast couple program and a speakeasy for Petrillo banned records, an attractive dancer by name Nadine Gae, and an over-all air of unaffected modesty. The stars of the occasion, the Hartmans, have never struck me as being particularly amusing, though I am glad to say for their sakes that many fine people think that I do not know what I am talking about when I make such a remark. And on the further debit side I am afraid that I have to list such witticisms as alluding to a woman from Butte as a beaut; the Apache dance number in which the male partner in a sweater scowlingly throws his female partner around the stage; the old vaudeville comedy magic act in which all the tricks go wrong; and the act in which Mrs. Hartman negotiates the venerable comedy dancing business of twirling 'round rapidly a dozen times and then staggering about the stage with feigned dizziness while Mr. Hartman despairingly tries to hold her up. Nor am I able to wax hysterical when Mr. Hartman experiences a violent startle upon the loud pop of a champagne cork, when a French waiter inquires "*Comme?*" and Mr. Hartman asks, "Come on where?", or when a girl singer stands in a purple light, screws up her features as if she

were in the throes of a severe attack of colenteritis, and moans that it isn't easy to let a lover go when you still love him. But when Hank Ladd is on describing the typical Tennessee Williams character who is despondent because she has two ears, when the Gae girl is dancing, when Elaine Stritch is making with the baby talk and the Dixie accent (though surely not when she is imitating Hildegard or Fannie Brice in a jungle ditty), and when Ladd is on again telling of the actor they let out of the show because he demanded three hundred dollars a week whereas the Hartmans didn't want to pay him anything and they couldn't effect a compromise — when such is the situation, I am right there having a good time with everyone else.

It would seem, nevertheless, that the day has come for someone to think up a slight departure from the boiler-plate pattern of these intimate revues. One and all, they are much alike. First, the master of ceremonies with the patter. Second, the tough female blues singer in a bright light followed by the dancing couple. Third, the sketch. Fourth, again the tough blues singer in a bright light. Fifth, again the master of ceremonies and more patter. Sixth, the old vaudeville comedy act. Seventh, the female sentimental singer in a pink light. Eighth, another sketch. Ninth, the female comedy singer, with gestures. Tenth, the master of ceremonies and still more patter. Eleventh, the café scene with imitations of well-known night club entertainers. And, after the intermission, first, the blues singer in the bright light accompanied by the tap dancer. Second, another sketch. Third, the sentimental singer in a purple light accompanied by the dancing couple. Fourth, the master of ceremonies and more still of the patter. Fifth, another comedy song number. Sixth, another sketch. And, finally, the ensemble shouting a song number at the tops of their lungs.

Sometimes it seems as if even a team of acrobats would provide a little novelty.

LAMP AT MIDNIGHT. DECEMBER 21, 1947

A play by Barrie Stavis. Produced by New Stages, Inc., for 6 weeks' performances in the New Stages Theatre.

PROGRAM

GALILEO GALILEI	<i>Peter Capell</i>	ALDOBRANDINI	<i>Joseph Silver</i>
POLISSENA	<i>Kathryn Eames</i>	CESARINI	<i>Martin Tarby</i>
SAGREDO NICCOLINI	<i>Ralph Camargo</i>	CARDINAL DEL MONTE	<i>Earl I. Hammond</i>
GEPE MAZZOLINI	<i>Frederic De Wilde</i>	CARDINAL MAFFEO BARBERINI	<i>Kermit Murdock</i>
MAGINI	<i>Ernest Stone</i>	AMBASSADOR VIGLIENNA	<i>Leonard Sherer</i>
SIZZI	<i>Martin Balsam</i>	FATHER CLAVIUS	<i>Mort Neudell</i>
LIBRI	<i>Willard Swire</i>	FATHER LEMBO	<i>Michael Howard</i>
D'ELCI	<i>Earl George</i>	CARLO BARBERINI	<i>Ben Irving</i>
PRINCE CESI	<i>Arnold Robertson</i>	FRANCESCO BARBERINI	<i>Leon Janney</i>
FABRICUS	<i>John Merlin</i>	MOTHER SUPERIOR	<i>Dorothy Patten</i>
TERENZIO	<i>Terry Becker</i>		
CESARE	<i>Jay Barney</i>		
COUNT MOROSINI	<i>Louis Hollister</i>		

SYNOPSIS: *The action takes place in Florence and Rome and is in two acts.*

Director: *Boris Tumarin.*

INDIGNANT OVER THE Experimental Theatre's relinquishment of the play in favor of Brecht's, which also dealt with Galileo, and believing that the reason therefor lay solely in Charles Laughton's willingness to appear in the latter, the just organized New Stages group hastened to give Stavis' work a hearing. The action was justified, in a measure. While the play aims considerably higher than its author's talents can shoot, it is relatively the better of the two.

As in the Brecht effort, the subject is again the struggle between Galileo and the Roman Catholic church, which protested his scientific discoveries as violative of its dogma; his inner struggle between reverence for the church and faith in scientific truth and knowledge; and his forced, racked surrender to compromise. While some of the epi-

sodes are dramatically animate and while the internal power of the theme makes some headway even in some others that are not, the whole is very much less effective than its parts because the protracted argumentation unavoidable in any honest handling of the theme tends to generate the over-all air of a lecture platform poorly masked in stage settings. This is perhaps inevitable in any play about a man of profound thought, since such thought does not lend itself to active drama and to be given dramatic movement must craftily be percolated through wit and humor or intermittently distracted from itself through one chicane or another. Profound thought, in brief, is embarrassed in drama save it be intimated rather than directly expressed, save it be used sparingly, and save it be colored now and then with the pretty dyes of emotion. The mind of a deep thinker calls in the theatre for a woman somewhere in the background sentimentally to interrupt it or for some similiar dramaturgical humbuggery to give it an acceptable stage life. It may be sad that this is so, but drama, alas, seems to be as confounded and put to rout by a naked brain as the brain itself would be by the whims of drama.

The production was of an agreeably simple nature, in contrast to much of that in the Brecht case, though the acting and direction were mediocre.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

DECEMBER 22, 1947

A dramatization of the Dostoievski novel by Rodney Ackland. Produced by Robert Whitehead and Oliver Rea for 64 performances in the National Theatre.

PROGRAM

LEBEZIATNIKOFF	Ben Morse	DMITRI PROKOVITCH RAZOUMIKHIN	
SONIA	Dolly Haas	Alexander Scourby	
KATERINA IVANNA	Lillian Gish	ZAMETOFF	Richard Purdy
POLYA	Betty Lou Keim	CASIMIR STALISLAWOWITCH	
LEDA	Sherry Smith	LOOSHINSKY	E. A. Krumschmidt
IVAN	Paton Price	PULCHERIA ALEXANDROVNA	
AMALIA	Elisabeth Neumann	Alice John	
ANYUTKA	Wauna Paul	DOUNIA	Marian Seldes
HIS ASSISTANT	Robert Donley	PORFIRI PETROVITCH	
NASTASIA	Galina Talva	Vladimir Sokoloff	
DARIA	Susan Steell	PRIEST	Sandy Campbell
LIZAVIETA	Mary James	WIDOW	Amy Douglass
RODION ROMANITCH RASKOLNIKOFF	John Gielgud	HER DAUGHTER	Jeri Souwinet
SIMON ZAHARITCH MARMELODOFF	Sanford Meisner	FOMITCH	Richard Hayes

SYNOPSIS: *The action takes place in a lodging house in St. Petersburg in the summer of 1860. Scene 1. Evening. Scene 2. Morning, a week later. Scene 3. Late afternoon and evening of the next day. Scene 4. The following morning. Scene 5. Morning of the following day.*

Director: Theodore Komisarjevsky.

IT USED TO BE SAID that if you sat in front of the Café de la Paix long enough you would soon or late see pass everyone in the world you knew. It may still be said if you sit in front of the stage long enough you will soon or late see pass still another dramatization of Dostoievski's *Crime And Punishment*. The dramatizations seem to pop up at intervals with almost the regularity of *Hedda Gabler* and colds in the head, and most of them are scarcely more acceptable. In my own time, I must have seen from fifteen

to twenty in one part of the globe or another, and some of them, I may say, were to be described as whifflebirds. On the home soil, for example, I remember one sponsored by Richard Mansfield called *Rodion The Student* which, as I dimly recollect from that far back, suggested that Dostoievski must also have been the author of Mansfield's vehicle, *Beau Brummell*, though Clyde Fitch seemed to be credited in the program. Sometime later, I recall much more vividly one by Laurence Irving, acted by E. H. Sothern, which, until the management protested that the cost of the marquee lights would bankrupt it, bore the title *The Fool Hath Said In His Heart: There Is No God*. Lending a sympathetic ear to the management's remonstrances, Mr. Sothern magnanimously shortened it to simply *The Fool Hath Said: There Is No God*, which pacified the management for all of one-half second flat. When the lights finally went on, *A Fool Hath Said* was the compromise. What Dostoievski would have thought of it all could not have counted, since he would not have recognized the play as anything in any way associated with him.

There were others, one a curio called *The Humble*, produced two decades ago, and another a re-dramatization of a previous dramatization under the novel's title by Victor Wolfson and Victor Trivas, produced about twelve years ago. This one got the outer flavor of the book rather better than the others but, like the rest, it got the book itself not at all, and small wonder. For the novel's canvas and its paints are of such dimension and color that any play fashioned from it to be at all a faithful reflection would make the average play look like a blackout sketch. It can no more honestly be reduced to the standard short playing time than *Götterdämmerung*. Its fabric is almost as complex as that of *Antony And Cleopatra*, and like the latter its stage presentation in any form offers unusual hazards.

The present version by Mr. Ackland has its points but, like all the others, is hardly satisfactory to respecters of the novel. It swims over the melodramatic surfaces, and with some skilful theatrical overhand strokes, but it dives

nowhere into the psychological depths and only shallowly into the philosophical. The result is a play that, save in one or two scenes, merely skims some of the plot elements of the novel and leaves the cream of its body untouched. What remains is a stage show of sorts but a drama that seldom gets farther into its source than the latter's superficial machinery.

In a statement published before his version opened, Mr. Ackland betrayed both his problem and himself. "I was determined," he said, "to give the play a life independent of the novel." The adjective serves as a criticism of his approach to the job, with the added criticism that the independent life has not, except in an obvious melodramatic direction, materialized. "Previous versions had been done with episodic technique," he continued. While some previous versions had been thus done, there were others of which he evidently is not aware which were no more episodic than his own version. "Based on the assumption that a slaying in a play automatically classified it as a murder drama, emphasis had been laid on the cop-and-killer duel. I preferred to stress the philosophic duel between the Inspector and Raskolnikoff," he noted. He may think that he has stressed the philosophic duel between the characters, but aside from two or three bits of dialogue his duel remains exactly what he describes as the cop-and-killer business in the earlier versions. And the slivers of philosophic utterance were incorporated into some of these earlier versions just as he has incorporated them into his. Furthermore, if, as he believes, a slaying in a play automatically classified it as a murder drama, it would have been the theatrical convention to classify *Hamlet*, among others, as a murder drama, which may be said, unnecessarily, to be nonsense.

"It occurred to me that the intent of the murder was the same that led to the establishment of Dachau in our time. Raskolnikoff had decided a certain woman was vermin and should be exterminated, as Hitler wanted to do to the Jew and as the white supremacist would the Negro," he confided. How he reconciles this cerebration with his

subsequent ethical statement that "Contained in the story, inescapable, eternal, is the truth perceptible equally to the stone-ager and to the contemporary savant: that there is no right greater than that of the individual," I am at a loss to know.

"Eliminating the murder from view, I nevertheless thought of somehow suggesting it to the mind's eye of the audience," he proceeded. "For a while I toyed with having the landlady ask Raskolnikoff to chop the meat for dinner. Swinging his arm, Raskolnikoff would sink the meat-axe with a wet crunch into the meat and bone. Second thought told me this was a wretchedly bad idea. Besides, in food-rationed London the sight of fresh meat on a stage would have provoked resentment, envy and applause." That it required a second thought on Mr. Ackland's part to dismiss his butcher-shop idea is scarcely a credit to his fundamental competence as a dramatist. And that it would have been merely the sight of the meat on the stage that would have provoked resentment in London audiences, to say nothing under the dramatic circumstances of envy and, worse still, applause seems to me to be not only a reflection on London audiences but on Mr. Ackland's knowledge of dramatic values.

The local stage presentation of the Ackland version of the novel has a few virtues and many more faults. The setting by a Russian who has elected the name Paul Sheriff is atmospherically excellent, and so, in several of the scenes, is the lighting. But while the Komisarjevsky staging and direction of group movement and detail are pictorial, he has failed to synchronize the whole into a steady rhythm and has permitted such an excessive overplaying, mugging and shouting in the case of a number of the principal players that some of them give the impression that they are performing for an audience made up of the deaf and partly blind. There are also some peculiar interpretations of the roles. Mr. Gielgud, for one example, indicates the tortured workings of Raskolnikoff's conscience almost entirely in the kind of grimaces associated with Willie Howard in the old vaudeville act when his

brother Eugene took him to task for his unbecoming conduct with a nursemaid in the Park. The best of the performances is that of Vladimir Sokoloff as the examining magistrate.

Everything considered, I fear that the exhibit is best critically described, to borrow Dorothy Parker's reply to the author of a drugstore murder novel who asked her to supply him with a title, as *Crime And Punishment, Jr.*

Incidentally, it is likely that one of the reasons for the numerous commissioned dramatizations of the novel is the fascination which the role of Raskolnikoff has always held for the star actor and which in older days sometimes exceeded even that of a beauty passionately craved by members of the fair sex. It proffers him as a Thinker and so excites his secret vanity even more greatly than ever it was excited by the role which presented him as a fellow of tremendous valiance, preferably a Duc, who, clad in a white silk shirt with balloon sleeves, single-handed put to rout with his sword twenty or thirty myrmidons of his enemy. To appear as a profound philosopher or scientist, or merely as a mentality capable of meditating the problems of the cosmos, affords him a larger ecstasy and a larger dose of unction to his pretensions than some of his curly-haired, bull-chested, older colleagues ever enjoyed in rescuing the fair Lady Melrose from the foul embraces of the dissolute Comte de Beaulieu or in duelling all over the stage and by their pluck and spirit arousing the admiration of the entire erstwhile foolishly contemptuous corps of Louis XIII's Musketeers.

THE CRADLE WILL ROCK

DECEMBER 26, 1947

A revival of the musical whatnot by Marc Blitzstein. Produced by Michael Myerberg for 34 performances in, initially, the Mansfield Theatre.

PROGRAM

MOLL	<i>Estelle Loring</i>	SISTER MISTER	<i>Jo Hurt</i>
GENT	<i>Edward S. Bryce</i>	STEVE	<i>Stephen West Downer</i>
DICK	<i>Jesse White</i>	SADIE POLOCK	<i>Marie Leidal</i>
COP	<i>Taggart Casey</i>	GUS POLOCK	<i>Walter Scheff</i>
REVEREND SALVATION		BUGS	<i>Edward S. Bryce</i>
	<i>Harold Patrick</i>	LARRY FOREMAN	<i>Alfred Drake</i>
EDITOR DAILY	<i>Brooks Dunbar</i>	ELLA HAMMER	<i>Muriel Smith</i>
YASHA	<i>Jack Albertson</i>	ATTENDANT'S VOICE	<i>Hazel Shermet</i>
DAUBER	<i>Chandler Cowles</i>	FIRST REPORTER	<i>Rex Coston</i>
PRESIDENT PREXY	<i>Howard Blaine</i>	SECOND REPORTER	<i>Gil Houston</i>
PROFESSOR TRIxie	<i>Leslie Litomy</i>	CLERK	<i>Howard Shanet</i>
PROFESSOR MAMIE	<i>Edmund Hewitt</i>		<i>Lucretia Anderson</i>
PROFESSOR SCOOT	<i>Ray Fry</i>		<i>Robert Burr</i>
DOCTOR SPECIALIST	<i>Robert Pierson</i>		<i>John Fleming</i>
HARRY DRUGGIST	<i>David Thomas</i>	CHORUS	<i>Michael Pollock</i>
MR. MISTER	<i>Will Geer</i>		<i>Germaine Poulin</i>
MRS. MISTER	<i>Vivian Vance</i>		<i>Napoleon Reed</i>
JUNIOR MISTER	<i>Dennis King, Jr.</i>		<i>Gwen Ward</i>

Director: *Howard da Silva.*

WHEN FIRST PRODUCED ten years ago at an outlay that must have amounted to all of forty or fifty dollars, Mr. Blitzstein's effort profited from the sympathy and goodwill which are often bestowed on necessarily economical theatrical enterprises, particularly such as are described by the reviewers as "brave experimental ventures." We had another touching example in the year past when *Our Lan'*, done down in Henry Street for a few hundred dollars, received much generous praise and when the identical play subsequently done on Broadway for forty

thousand got notices from the very same reviewers that were far from favorable.

Blitzstein's work has now been revived in the uptown theatre. In place of the single piano that served the original production, there is an orchestra — more, an orchestra presided over by a conductor in white tie and tails; in place of amateurs, the company is professional; and instead of a general atmosphere suggestive of high-school dramatics, the air is more substantially theatrical. The consequence is that some of those whose hearts were touched by the obligatory, even pathetic, simplicity and meagreness of the original, and who persuaded themselves to see non-existent virtues in it, have turned cold-hearted and do not see them any longer.

Though a fellow of such warmth of heart that it sometimes burns the waistcoat off me, I could not see them in the first place. The show seemed to me then what it seems to me still, which is to say an only faintly passable stunt. In better truth, it does not seem to me to be even as faintly passable now as it did initially, since time has converted what was already an unconscious travesty into a travesty of a travesty. The admission that the present production is an advance over the original is therefore much like allowing that a patient down with a complication of diphtheria and scarlet fever indicates improvement in the former direction, despite a continuing inflammatory throat condition, but that the scarlet fever is still unabated. Mr. Blitzstein is that patient. His inflammation on behalf of Labor and his fever when he thinks of Capital are of a violence fatal to his purpose, since Labor in the intervening decade has progressed economically with such strides that Capital is sometimes pretty lucky to have its shirt left. Listening to his wholesale indignation at this hour is like listening to impassioned exhortations to remember the *Maine*.

Critically, except for a few scattered moments, the exhibit remains the miscegenation of old Union Square soapbox propaganda and a talented juke-box. Its form is so ambiguous that even the author and his successive pro-

ducers seem never to have been able to make up their minds just how to catalogue it. It has thus from time to time been dubbed everything from a musical drama to an opera and from a musical play and operetta to a concert drama. Presently, in still further puzzlement, it is being termed "a play in music." But however it is sliced, it persists, so far as I am concerned, in being blutwurst, in a fancy skin. It isn't musical drama because what it intends as drama is really farce. It isn't opera because its score is, if anything, musical revue. It isn't a musical play because there is no play but merely a succession of separate numbers loosely strung together. It isn't an operetta for the same reason that it isn't an opera. It isn't concert drama because it isn't drama or, save its score were to be played minus actors, concert, and then decidedly freakish concert. Nor is it in the current description a play in music, unless anything at all on a theatre stage may be called a play. What it is, in short, is not the romance of standard opera, nor the realism of such experimental opera as *Street Scene*, nor much of anything except cantankerous proletarian blitz set to indifferent music and proffered to pop-gun æsthetes as a revolutionary cannon ball.

If noise were the chief desideratum of the acting and singing arts, the present company would be replete with true genius.

TOPAZE. DECEMBER 27, 1947

A revival of the comedy by Marcel Pagnol, translated and adapted by Benn Levy. Produced by Yolanda Mero-Irion, for the New Opera Company, for one performance in the Morosco Theatre.

PROGRAM

TOPAZE	Oscar Karlweis	MONSIEUR RAMON	David Burke
JACQUES BLONDET	Alan Shay	MONSIEUR GASTON	Jimmie Dutton
MUCHE	Robert Chisholm	MONSIEUR PERRON	Harold Calvin
ERNESTINE	Effie Afton	BARONESS PITART-VERGINOLIES	Helen Bonfils
TAMISE	Joe E. Marks	REGIS CASTEL-BENAC	Clarence Derwent
SUZANNE COURTOISE	Tilly Losch	BUTLER	David Jones
MONSIEUR CORDIER	Kevin Matthews	ROGER DE BERVILLE	Philip Robinson
MONSIEUR JESSERAND	Clifford Sales	ODETTE	Lucille Patton
MONSIEUR PITART-VERGINOLIES	Edward Benjamin	POLICEMAN	Jean Saks
MONSIEUR DE VICTOR	Roy Rogers	GERMAINE	Ethel Madsen
MONSIEUR TRONCHE-BOBINE	Preston Zukor	A VENERABLE OLD MAN	G. Swayne Gordon
MONSIEUR DURAND	Sonny Cavell		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. A school classroom in the Pension Mucbe. May, 1910. Act II. A small salon at the home of Suzanne Courtoise. Late afternoon same day. Act III. Scene 1. An office of the Topaze Company. Two months later. Scene 2. Same office. One year later.

Director: Leo Mittler.

EIGHTEEN LONG YEARS have elapsed since the play was first seen here. Those accustomed to the prevailing ways of play reviewing will therefore naturally expect that the statement will be followed by the observation that it has aged considerably in the meantime. It accordingly becomes my unpleasant duty to disappoint their anticipation. The play has not aged in the least and is still quite as amusing as it originally was. It remains, in a word, a humorous and diverting satirical comedy, though I shall not blame anyone who saw its present performance for

doubting me. Except for Clarence Derwent in the role he played those many years ago, the acting, particularly that of Oscar Karlweis in the leading role once occupied by Frank Morgan, rid the comedy of most of its humor, and when for a stray moment the acting did not, the stage direction of Leo Mittler did. Only Derwent managed the business in hand with any drollery. For the rest, the poor author had to content himself with nothing but Tilly Losch's visual beauty. That, true, was something, even for a sardonic Frenchman, but it was hardly enough to content a sardonic Frenchman's play.

Pagnol's theme is that honesty may be the best policy but that the only one who ever makes a dollar out of it is the publisher who says so in the school-books. His upright man who learns that probity is not all it is cracked up to be and who turns prosperous and happy sharper is a gay creation, as are his two other bunco-men who similarly appreciate that maxims are for colored postcards and the walls of nurseries. But such juicy swindlers must not be swindled out of their amusement qualities by swindling acting.

The translation by Benn Levy is an acceptable one save for the conventional belief that a measure of stiffness in English phraseology will best suggest foreign speech. It of course does nothing of the kind. What it usually suggests is, first, that the translator lacks a true ear for such speech and, secondly, at least to American audiences, that the actors employing it are not raw Frenchmen but over-educated pulp magazine subscribers.

The even comparative merit of a comedy like this of Pagnol's, written almost a quarter of a century ago, only the more impresses upon one the decline of comedy in so many directions. Leading the mortality statistics in the catalogue is the artificial species. The mantle so handsomely handed down by Congreve to Sheridan and by Sheridan to Wilde has turned into a tattered, patched, and seedy evening coat. Since Wilde, the genre has deteriorated into nothing better than the kind of thing that Noel Coward stands for: comedy not artificial in any authentic

critical sense but merely trivial. The writing of true artificial comedy commands a mind of sorts and the genius for distilling the artificial from the real. The purely artificial mind can not master it. It calls for a wit based upon a sound observation and criticism of the peoples and mores of its period; for a wit, in short, that however seemingly capricious digs pointedly into the fashions, manners, and foibles of its time. Without mind, it becomes simply frippery, masked with inconsequential humors. Its commentary becomes vaudeville, and its picture of its people is developed in a mental dark room in the acids of wisecracks. The artificiality lies not in the work itself but in the playwright. It takes an uncommon hand and an uncommon skill to create an artificial flower that, while plainly artificial, will give the impression of bearing a close resemblance to a real one, minus only the scent. The artificial comedy of these later years is all too transparently manufactured of cheap, tinted tissue, minus not only the scent but any stem that resembles even remotely anything that ever grew out of the soil.

The contrast between the two kinds of comedy of manners may be illustrated, appallingly, by a scene from Congreve on the one hand and by one from Coward on the other. Herewith, Congreve:

Mrs. Millamant: I won't be called names after I'm married; positively I won't be called names.

Mirabel: Names!

Mrs. Millamant: Ay, as wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love, sweetheart, and the rest of that nauseous cant in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar — I shall never bear that. Good Mirabel, don't let us be familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks, like my lady Fidler and Sir Francis, nor go to Hyde Park together the first Sunday in a new chariot, to provoke eyes and whispers, and then never to be seen together again; as if we were proud of one another the first week and ashamed of one another ever after. Let us never visit together nor go to a play together; but let us be very strange and well-

bred: let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while, and as well-bred as if we were not married at all.

Herewith Coward:

Clare (at telephone): Hallo — yes — hallo, darling — no, it's Clare — yes, he's here — No, I really couldn't face it — yes, if I were likely to go to India I'd come, but I'm not likely to go to India — I think Rajahs bumble up a house-party so terribly — yes, I know he's different, but the other one's awful — Angela had an agonizing time with him — all the dining-room chairs had to be changed because they were leather and his religion prevented him sitting on them — all the dogs had to be kept out of the house because they were unclean, which God knows was true of the Bedlington, but the other ones were clean as whistles — and then to round everything off he took Laura Merstham in his car and made passes at her all the way to Newmarket — all right, darling, here he is — *(to Bogey)* it's Nina, she wants to talk to you —

Bogey (at telephone): Hallo, Nin — I can't on Wednesday, I've got a Guest Night — it's a hell of a long way, it'd take hours.

The artificial comedy of manners, however, is not the only form that has fallen on evil days. Polite or so-called drawing-room comedy seems also largely to have gone the way of the other. With Haddon Chambers, Hubert Henry Davies, R. C. Carton, Robert Marshall and their ilk dead, with W. S. Maugham's retirement from the theatre, and with Frederick Lonsdale latterly delinquent, England's sole contribution in late years, aside from the Coward aforesaid, has been a parcel of Rattigans and Savorys, all without exception unequipped for anything but minor glossy showshop stuffs, feeble, strained, and generally witless. France, once a source of much critical pleasure, has provided nothing, or at best only weak variants of what her playwrights had earlier managed so deftly. Bourdet, Guitry, Achard, and the rest, when they

have written anything at all, have produced plays either considerably inferior to their earlier works or obvious, tired, and crippled paraphrases.

Drawing-room comedy has never been the field of German playwrights, and Germany has hence never figured in the form. Austrian playwrights similarly have seldom been fetched by the species and, when they were, have missed it. But Hungary in other days exported some agreeable specimens, as those who recall the Molnár school remember, and that school seems to have dried up sometime since. What is left? Italy? Italy, like Spain, never gifted in such divertissements, has not produced anything in years, and even then produced nothing in any way comparable to the English product. America? Let us see.

Only three men in the United States today figure in the form: Kelly, Behrman, and the naturalized former Englishman, van Druten. Kelly, however, is not strictly to be defined as a writer of polite drawing-room comedy, though his last play, *The Fatal Weakness*, a less able job than he has done in other directions, falls into the category. His plays, though sometimes scenically drawing-room and here and there intermittently suggesting polite comedy, are of a more serious essence and tend rather toward straight drama. They lack, too, the sense of fashion and deliberate wit of the genre. Behrman, who promised to be a polished comedy writer of some stature and who in one or two plays came off nicely, has in later years fallen victim to a social consciousness and didacticism which have played havoc with him. The sound writer of polite comedy is skilful in the art of saying something as if it amounted to nothing. The Behrmans say nothing as if it amounted to something. And in a voice that banishes their comedy purpose.

Van Druten perhaps comes closest at the moment to achieving the form. He has grace and style and wit. His weaknesses lie in his failure to catch quite the nonchalant tone proper to urbane comedy and in what seems to be an occasional calculated playing down to the groundlings. But there is in his writing a degree of taste and manner,

a cultivated point of view, and a quality of humor that in combination serve his ends.

Thirty-eight years ago, Walter Prichard Eaton, in an essay titled *Our Comedy Of Bad Manners*, observed, "All of us who care for the amenities of life, who esteem correct deportment in its proper place, who are charmed by grace and distinction and hurt by its absence from plays where it belongs, have suffered only too often from the prevalent bad manners of the American theatre. . . . It is characteristic of a certain type of jingo 'Americanism' to consider good manners as a sign of social snobbishness and to regard personal grace and distinction as a cover for mental and moral sloth, even a cover for the idle rich who ride down Fifth Avenue with lap dogs. This attitude is both a misapprehension of what constitutes good manners and personal distinction, and a gross flattery of those who ride down Fifth Avenue with lap dogs. . . . Could the stage display more personal distinction, could it put forth the charm of good manners, of style and elegance, could it show the grace of correctly spoken English, it would not, perhaps, so entirely hold the mirror up to American nature (as that nature is expressed in American manners), but it would make American nature more worthy to be mirrored."

Though there are nowadays left few idle rich to ride or even walk down Fifth Avenue with or without lap dogs, the scene as Eaton described it has otherwise after these many years little changed. The comedy of bad manners still operates profusely on our stage. Sometimes its vulgarity is amusing; much more often its vulgarity is painful. In the better cases, as in some such exhibit as *Born Yesterday*, we get bad manners deliberately dramatized for their own sake, and the result is entertaining. In the middle ground, as in such as *John Loves Mary*, we get bad manners often confused in the playwright's mind with good, and the result is a species of backstairs farce lodged in a semi-drawing-room atmosphere. In the worst cases, as in such as *Heads Or Tails*, we get playwrights who can not distinguish between good manners and bad and who

give us the bad in the full conviction that they are the very essence of the good, let alone extremely high-toned.

As a sample of the dialogue in these latter abnormalities, I submit the following from the last named:

She (*soulfully*): We will go to Mama Gorgongolies in the Village and have chianti and cherries jubilee. (*Exploding with enthusiasm*): We won't get to bed until twelve o'clock.

He (*coily*): Let's make it ten.

She (*even more coily*): Let's.

He (*quite beside himself*): And you will wear your black nightgown.

She (*pretending to be shocked*): Darling!

He (*aggressively*): You will, won't you?

She (*overpowered by his ardor and demurely dropping her eyes*): Yes.

The comedy of bad manners at its best is often critically condoned on the ground that it reflects more or less accurately the American characters and acts with which it deals. The condonation undoubtedly has a measure of justification. Bad manners, vulgarity, assertiveness, and the insecurity of vocabulary that seeks refuge in profanity and even obscenity are characteristics of a considerable proportion of our citizenry, who would be as out of place in a drawing-room as an office chair or a rhinoceros; and it is rank snobbishness to insist that drama either elevate them and present them otherwise or dismiss them entirely. But that is not the point. The point is rather that the comedy in question all too frequently employs an honest vulgarity to exaggerated vulgar ends and in the process renders it palpably dishonest.

The notion that all the characters in Restoration comedy were to the drawing-room born and bred is, of course, ridiculous. Restoration comedy, as almost everyone should know, had its bounders and vulgarians quite as modern American comedy has them, and they were as greatly part and parcel of their time as are ours. But the dramatists who wrote of them were writers of distinction, where-

as those who write of them today may occasionally be gifted in dramaturgy but otherwise are literary hacks. Their writing gives the impression that their vulgar characters are of a piece with themselves, and the dramatic bad manners much their personal own. Nor need we hark back to Restoration, Victorian and the earlier Edwardian times to note the difference. There probably has been no comedy more plentiful in cads, bounders and vulgarians than Maugham's *Our Betters*. Yet the treatment and the sheer literary skill lift the play to some relative elevation and one which our later American comedy fabricators have not approximated.

The Lindsay-Crouse dramatization of the Clarence Day memoirs, *Life With Father*, has enjoyed the record consecutive run for a comedy in the American theatre. Of the more than six million people who have seen it and contributed more than ten million dollars to its box-office, it is probably safe to say that the greater number regard it as the closest approach to a comedy of good manners which they have engaged in the period. Their regard for it in that light is doubtless due to the circumstances that its characters are fairly affluent, of respectable social status, and dress well, that they speak the English language without a Broadway accent, that they can afford servants, and that the setting is a well-furnished so-called "morning room" in a house on then fashionable Madison Avenue in New York. Yet, for all these externals, the fact remains that it is for the larger part not a comedy of good manners at all, but one of very bad. The central figure, the father of the title, is a compendium of bad manners; several of the other characters would have been kicked out of any Edith Wharton drawing-room, presuming that they could have got into the house in the first place; the general conduct is severely at odds with the punctilio; the house is run in a middle-class manner; the atmosphere is middle-class; and the speech is equally middle-class. But so used are our audiences to something much lower in social tone that by comparison the comedy seems to them to be something quite definitely tony.

Our theatregoers, in brief, have become so impregnated with the comedy of bad manners that one in which the manners are even a shade better strikes them as being the height of fashionable good taste and refinement.

And conditions seem to be growing increasingly worse. The manner which a Langdon Mitchell brought into our theatre and a Jesse Lynch Williams after him has all but disappeared. Our present day comedy most often sounds as if it had been conceived and written by men whose idea of a butler has been gained from the screen performances of Arthur Treacher, whose idea of style begins and ends with the wearing of dinner coats, whose notion of polished wit is a wisequip about caviar, whose conception of cultivated conversation is anything that embraces allusions to Freud, Gide and Dorothy Parker, and whose drawing-rooms or their equivalents are notable chiefly for the obvious discomfort of characters who are asked to appear nonchalantly at ease in them. This is nowhere more evident than in those comedies which hopefully aspire to the polite label. The unintentional vulgarity in such instances is frequently double that of the intentional in other dramatic directions.

What it all comes to, I suppose, is the needlessly repeated criticism that one can write only about what one himself knows and feels and has at least to a degree experienced. Our playwrights today with rare exception do not know of what they write, and the result is much like an "English society comedy" which its author, a young man resident in Bridgeport, Connecticut, not long ago sent to me, unsolicited, for my inspection. It was not necessary for me to read farther than the cast of characters and the setting. The former disclosed, at the top of the list, the following: "Count Debrett, a Lord." The latter was described as "The Drawing-room and Adjoining Boudoir of the Duchess."

D'OYLY CARTE OPERA COMPANY

DECEMBER 29, 1947

A repertory of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. Produced by the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company for 17 weeks' performances in the Century Theatre.

PRINCIPALS

Martyn Green, Charles Dornin, Darrell Fancourt, Leonard Osborn, Thomas Round, Richard Walker, Richard Watson, Radley Flynn, Gwyneth Cullimore, Denise Findlay, Joan Gillingham, Ella Halman, Margaret Mitchell, and Helen Roberts.

Director: Anna Bethel.

THE THEATREGOER who never can get enough of Gilbert and Sullivan was now once again in his element. The theatregoer in question is for the most part an elderly gentleman in an elderly tuxedo, as it was then known, and is rarely seen in a playhouse except when his old favorites are the bill, whereupon he emerges from his inglenook and blissfully hums the old songs ahead of the singers, and laughs fit to kill at all the old whimsies, and has the sixtieth or seventieth time of his life. I envy him. I envy him though, like him, his lovebirds are among my lovebirds too. I envy him rather because, unlike him, I somehow can get enough of them and because in this late day of my theatregoing and after having swum in them since boyhood, often not without large pleasure, I find that endless repetition has got me down. I duly appreciate that the confession will cause him and others like him to view me as a candidate for that branch of psychosomatic medicine known as cerebral osteopathy, which concerns itself with persuading the patient to forget the bones in his brain. But just the same, I have had my fill. I already know the twain by heart and, while I share everyone else's warm admiration for them, I do not experience much present delight in learning them by heart all over again.

I thus probably find myself in a class apart from many playgoers, among them those who similarly are always able to discover new and fresh meanings in *Hamlet*. In the course of my professional duties, I obediently sit through the famous comic operas one after another and, while of course fully realizing the worth of most of them, no longer have much fun. This, obviously, is an admission no critic should make. To be respected, a critic should pretend that he finds illimitable personal rapture in anything of unquestioned merit, even though he has seen and heard it more times than he remembers. It is demanded of him by tradition that *The Mikado*, for instance, seem as hilarious the fiftieth times he attends it as the first, that the satire of *Patience* never cease to overwhelm him with its cleverness, and that the rest of the repertory continue to enchant him with no slightest let-up. He must, in short, be a liar, not about the quality of the operettas, but about the boundless jocund effect they have on him. Well, I'm the boy who chopped down the cherry-tree. I am tired of hearing the works year after year; I no longer get the lift from them that I once did; and to blazes with critical respectability.

There is another remarkable thing about the inveterate Gilbert and Sullivan fans, and it makes one envy them double measure. No matter how poor the performance, they will, if it is not an outright garlic, swallow it. They may, true enough, reluctantly admit that maybe it is not so good as some they have seen, but no matter. You can't kill Gilbert and Sullivan whatever you do to them is their creed, and they stick to it, raptly. Some of the rest of us may ask for at least a little stage talent, but we only offend them. Gilbert and Sullivan are to them as their mothers, family doctors, and pet dogs: they can do no wrong and no one can do wrong to them.

Loyalty is often a laudable quality, and I am not mocking it as such. But, like love and criticism of acting, it is not always exactly discriminating. The Gilbert and Sullivan operas remain what they ever have been. But when they are produced, as often they are produced, with set-

tings and costumes that would be blackballed by the membership committee of any respectable storehouse, with singers who are only moderately acceptable and who can not act, and with direction that evidently has confused the stage with a gout clinic, loyalty takes on a suspension of judgment comparable to dismissing as of no consequence a bad attack of parotiditis or love.

These strictures certainly do not in some respects apply to this D'Oyly Carte company. Though its personnel is nothing much in the department of acting, its voices are considerably superior to the average and give the productions their full due. Moreover, the inner spirit of the exhibits is nicely realized. There can be little complaint in these quarters. It is chiefly on the pictorial side and in the manipulation of the stage that matters are lacking. Most of the scenery and costumes look like something Donald Wolfit left behind in England when he came over last year, and the direction too frequently insinuates that some of the actors are victims of Friedreich's disease. The occasion, in brief, is satisfactory so far as the ears go, but for complete enjoyment it is perhaps advisable to keep the eyes closed.

There was, however, at least one item that we could look forward to with something approaching ecstasy. Whatever the settings and dress of the earlier presentations were like, it was promised that, if we were patient, the company's sixth offering, *The Yeomen Of The Guard*, would be sensational in one respect. There would be new scenery and new costumes. This was the most exciting piece of news about a Gilbert and Sullivan production in years. The prospect of seeing any such production, and one of *The Yeomen Of The Guard* in particular, that looked as if it had not been playing the English or American borscht circuit since 1875 was more than we could happily bear. I have been looking at *The Yeomen* both here and abroad maybe not quite so often as *The Merry Widow* but surely as often as *The Beggar's Opera*, and I have seen more Tower of London scenery that resembled the old August Döpschnitz brewery than I can recollect

without a couple of drinks. And I have also seen more Yeomen uniforms that looked like oversize red union suits with brass buttons attached than I can recall without three. So it came as tidings to be shouted from the housetops that at last I was going to be privileged to see something that would not make me think it wasn't *The Yeomen* I was at but much more probably an old Castle Square Opera company production of *The Daughter Of The Regiment*, which according to grandpa was something.

Came eventually the great night. The new scenery and the new costumes were there as promised. No longer did the Tower of London look like the old August Döpschnitz brewery; it resembled much more impressively the new wing to the old Schlitz brewery in Milwaukee. And no longer did the Yeomen uniforms look like oversize red union suits; they looked much more like oversize museum strawberry shortcakes.

The repertory, in addition to *The Yeomen*, included *The Mikado*, *The Pirates Of Penzance*, *Trial By Jury*, *Iolanthe*, *Pinafore*, *Cox And Box*, *The Gondoliers*, and *Patience*.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD. JANUARY 4. 1948

A play by Jan de Hartog. Produced by the Experimental Theatre, Inc., for 93 performances in, initially, the Maxine Elliott Theatre.

PROGRAM

RICHTERS	Joseph Anthony	AMERICAN NAVAL OFFICER	
HENKY	Robert White		Richard Coogan
WILLEMSE	Si Oakland	DUTCH NAVAL OFFICER	
OFFICER OF SOUTH AMERICAN			Eugene Stuckmann
MILITARY POLICE	Carmen Costi	THE CLERGYMAN	Harry Irvine
MEYER	John Becher		Florence Aquino
JORIS KUIPER, CAPTAIN			Joe Bernard
	John Garfield		Nola Chilton
SOUTH AMERICAN CONSUL			Allan Frank
	Wallace Acton	PASSENGERS	Frances Gaar
RABBI	Wolfe Barzell		Ruth K. Hill
FIRST JEW	Michael Lewin		Bill Lazarus
SECOND JEW	Peter Kass		John Marley
"CHIEF" DAVELAAR	John Shellie		Edwin Ross
BRUINSMA, CAPTAIN OF THE			Paul Wilson
AMSTERDAM	Jabez Gray		

SYNOPSIS: *The action of the play takes place in the Captain's cabin of the steamship The Young Nelly. Act I. As the ship is lying in a South American port. Act II. A month and a half later, just off the United States coast. Act III. Four days later.*

Director: Lee Strasberg.

ONE WAY in which to get considerably more credit than one's due is to put on a play so bad that it is ridiculous and then follow it with another which, while also pretty bad, is not so bad as the other and which hence will be greeted by the reviewers as something relatively splendidous. Since readers are apt to overlook the fact that the praise is merely comparative, they will take it as wholly deserved, and the playwright, who, if he had not produced the first chokeberry, would properly have been raked over

the coals, accordingly finds himself sporting a tin medal which for the moment shines like gold.

De Hartog, the young Hollander whose *This Time Tomorrow* several months before was received with a barrage of whizzigs and catcalls, is now satisfiedly wearing the medal as a result of the production of this poor but somewhat better play. Instead of cancer research, transmigration of souls, life after death, and the mortal effect of too enthusiastic kissing, he presently occupies himself with the problem of religion in conflict with mundane law and once again loses whatever may have been dramatic in the idea in enough windy argument and, on this occasion, Biblical quotations to have driven the late Billy Sunday to a rest cure.

Since you can not get away, outside of politics, with simply windy argument and Biblical quotations, de Hartog has had to think up a vehicle in which to transport them to a theatre stage and some hoped-for paying trade. His conveyance is a ship loaded with unwanted Jewish refugees seeking a port of landing, and in an effort to make the argumentation and quotations pass for drama he dresses himself up as the ship's skipper and unloads them on a number of actors who in turn are made to pass themselves off for dramatic characters by loudly contradicting him. To extend matters for the necessary two and one-half hours' playing time, he resorts to the scarcely novel plan, first, of having the authorities at one port refuse the refugees a landing; secondly, of keeping the ship at sea vainly seeking another possible landing; and, thirdly and finally, of obtaining sanctuary for the refugees in an American port. This last he accomplishes through a stratagem so absurdly melodramatic (the scuttling of the vessel) that it would be swallowable only along with a bushel of peanuts. The sole things missing are the boatload of rescuing Marines, the waving of the flag, and the old-time brass rail on which merrily to slide down from the gallery.

It seemed, at least up to the moment, that what the Experimental Theatre's directorate particularly cherished were plays in which the leading character struggles fero-

ciously with his conscience. First we had Galileo giving his a violent wrestle; now we had this Skipper. Struggling with conscience has produced some fine plays and I am not complaining on that score. But when, as in the two plays in question, all I get is the spectacle of an actor having a terrible tussle with himself while the other actors are having a terrible tussle with their playwright, I think that I may be forgiven for wishing he might take off his makeup and go to work instead in a novel. It is only once or twice that de Hartog seems to remember that, after all, these other actors are supposed to be characters in an alive play and gives them anything dramatic to do. And it is for this reason, among others, that the evening offers the impression of de Hartog himself in a naval costume desperately trying to deliver a lengthy harangue on his religious confusion in the face of mankind's harsh legal edicts while being constantly interrupted and badgered by a cast of kibitzers.

The Strasberg staging was generally efficient and the company on the whole acceptable, but the feeling of the more experienced criticism was that while Garfield's performance of the central role met fully its melodramatic requirements, it failed to project, other than by facial and anatomical contortions, the introspective and meditative. Mr. Garfield added himself, in an interview previous to the opening, to the hierarchy of theatrical sages. The play, he observed, "is what is called non-commercial because there is no woman in the cast." The womanless *The Last Mile* was so non-commercial that it ran for almost an entire year. The womanless *Journey's End* was so non-commercial that it only made a fortune. The womanless *Command Decision* is so non-commercial that it has garnered a very handsome profit. And *Skipper Next To God* in turn is so non-commercial that the trade it did was so considerable that it had to be moved into a larger theatre and found its prosperous run halted only because Garfield saw fit to abandon it for his Hollywood commitments.

Among the numerous other such sages there is, for example, Mr. John Golden, the well-known producer and a

gentleman of apparently limitless brain. This Mr. Golden has recently contributed to one of the periodicals a treatise called "What Makes A Play A Hit?" "I have since a boy studied plays and playwrights from Sophocles to Sherwood and I believe I know as much as any long-haired bald brow who specializes in such matters," he confides to the reader. Though thus reassured, the reader is perhaps to be pardoned a morsel of skepticism in respect to what the oracle is subsequently to remember and announce when he then forthwith engages this: "I accepted a new comedy with its story of the rejuvenation of a couple of lovable comedy crooks . . . that seemed to me to have every ingredient for success." The successful comedy in point (its name was *Turn To The Right*) contained not a couple of but three crooks, the reader disturbingly recalls, and they were not rejuvenated but reformed.

Nevertheless, he considerably permits Mr. Golden to proceed. "After giving the question some thought, it occurred to me that the most interesting and heretofore unrecorded Common Denominator of the long-run popular hits seemed to be concerned with elderly or married people. The demand, it seems, is for the Old Birds," pontificates our authority. Whereupon he confidently mentions various long-run plays that fitted into the category. Among these were *Abie's Irish Rose*, in which both parties of the title were very young; *The Count Of Monte Cristo*, in which the hero was a young man and even after nearly twenty years in prison and for all his white wig factually not much over forty; *The County Fair*, with its low comedian merely dressed in spinsterish apparel and with its stage occupied by younger folk; *Sherlock Holmes* with William Gillette — "well past sixty," remarks Mr. Golden — in which Gillette, who at the time was only forty-three, played his own dramatization of the hardly doddering sleuth; and *Harvey*, in which the central character is far from venerable.

Mr. Golden thereupon speculates if there is not a bit of sense to the guess "that American theatregoers like old folks — liars, drunks, cheats, or respectable, virtuous, even

well-bred — anything so long as they're old." The reader speculates too, and then looks up the records of the fifty-four plays which have achieved the longest runs in the more modern American theatre. Of the fifty-four he finds that all of forty-six, maybe even forty-seven, did not deal with old folks and that in the great majority of these, as in most of the plays earlier named, the younger folk were not married, or at least not for the major portions of the exhibits. Undaunted, however, Mr. Golden proceeds to point out that if further substantiation of his theory is needed, the amusement columns of the newspapers listing the hits of last season would supply it. A glance at these columns showed the following plays which seem to embarrass our oracle: *Joan Of Lorraine*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *Happy Birthday*, *Years Ago*, *Burlesque*, *John Love Mary*, *The Importance Of Being Earnest*, *Alice In Wonderland* and some others, including such holdovers as *Born Yesterday*, *The Voice Of The Turtle*, *Harvey*, etc.

Mr. Golden winds up his authoritative cogitations with some words on what he describes as "the great Edgar Wallace story, *Ben Hur*."

Another deep thinker is Mr. Dudley Nichols, who has contributed to *Theatre Arts* an essay called, "Death Of A Critic." Though the essay, when it deals with the moving pictures, which constitute Mr. Nichols' most passionate interest, is commendable, its profundities when it engages itself with the theatre are, it is to be feared, considerably less so.

"At first," says Mr. Nichols, "the cinema began to dominate the theatre, though those who are wedded to the stage will hardly admit it. But the loosening-up of stage techniques, revolving or sliding stages, cutting to quick successive scenes by means of lighting effects, expressionism itself was a result of the influence of cinema." Our thinker here thinks, alas, through his prejudice. The cinema though earlier invented, actually began with the crude *The Great Train Robbery* in 1905 or thereabout. Since then it has, of course, greatly developed and gone in for such improvements as Mr. Nichols indicates. But far

from influencing the stage with them, as he oddly seems to imagine, it was the other way 'round. The sliding platform stage, he may be instructed, was the theatre's developed inheritance from the classic theatre of ancient Greece, in which, as a wagon device, it was known as the *eccyclema* or *exostra*. The revolving stage was invented in Japan in 1895 and was adopted by the German stage a year later. Cutting to quick successive scenes by means of lighting effects was familiar in the old Hanlon Brothers and Charles Yale extravaganzas back in the same general period. And when Mr. Nichols says that "expressionism itself was a result of the influence of the cinema," it seems to indicate that it is dangerous to go out in the Hollywood sun without a hat. Expressionism was known to the theatre and its stage, he should learn when he recovers, from the time of the first production of Strindberg's *The Dream Play* in 1902, and was subsequently and quickly taken up by such playwrights as Georg Kaiser, *et al.* It was the dramatic development of an attitude toward the arts which earlier originated in Germany, and it was many years later that the cinema first heard and made use of it.

The stage, in all save a few minor particulars, has dominated the cinema in all its most important aspects. The cinema has sometimes been successful in camouflaging the influences and passing them off on the unknowing as cinematically original. But simple research will show that what may impress such as being to the cinema born are really only extensions of or embellished borrowings from the stage.

The talented moving picture director, Rouben Mamoulian, once sought mightily to disprove this with the declaration that the screen had nevertheless devised ways to show things in drama that the stage with its limitations could not possibly show. It was politely pointed out to him that those were the very things which had no place in good drama and which the stage and its servitors had peremptorily discarded.

VOLPONE. JANUARY 8, 1948

A revival of the Ben Jonson satirical comedy. Produced by the newly established New York City Theatre Company for 2 weeks' performances in the City Center Theatre.

PROGRAM

VOLPONE	José Ferrer	SECOND GENTLEMAN	Bobby Busch
MOSCA	Richard Whorf	CELIA	Phyllis Hill
NANO	Leonardo Cimino	BONARIO	Walter Coy
ANDROGYNO	Richard McMurray	LADY POLITIC WOULD BE	
CASTRONE	Charles Mendick		Paula Laurence
CONCUBINA	Susan Center	NOTARIO	Lou Gilbert
VOLTORE	John Carradine	COMMENDATORI	Earl Jones
CORBACCIO	Fred Stewart		Frank Campanella
CORVINO	Le Roi Operti	CITTADINA	Marjorie Byers
FIRST GENTLEMAN	Victor Thorley		

SYNOPSIS: *The action takes place in sixteenth century Venice.*

Director: Richard Barr.

IT IS AN EXAGGERATION to say that *Volpone* is actor-proof, though even after experience with some rather dowdy performances one is tempted to venture the opinion, but it is less an exaggeration to say that it is audience-proof, or, more accurately, audience-proof to any theatre assemblage above the grade of one given to a veneration of Biblical drama, dog acts, and ice skating shows. Jonson's incontinent comedy of rogues and rascals is both in theme and genius of execution irresistible: a delight to the ear and in action an equal delight to the eye. It excels every other play in its thematic catalogue, and remains over the centuries as theatrically lively as in the year it was born.

The present version by the Messrs. Ferrer, Whorf and Barr, which is as free from scholastic reverence as a subsidized college football player and even more athletic, has offended the critical sensibilities of such as can not sleep for nights if they detect a misplaced colon in the

phrasing even of Marlowe. Its resort to occasional slapstick and giddy pace seems to them a violation of punctilious library conduct and intolerable disrespect to the text. I am afraid that I can not number myself among the affronted. The stage treatment, while grantedly here and there abandoned and dismissive of some of the text's rhetorical eloquence, does not vitiate the play's spirit; it has been duplicated in one or two European productions without critical qualm and to acceptable effect; and, above all, it goes to make a jolly show without damaging the core of the Jonson intent. For what he wrote is after all a minor modern classic and, excellent in its category as it remains, some liberties with it should not be too upsetting.

The performance, considering the short period allotted for rehearsals, and the physical production, considering the small means in hand, were — the admission fee was only two dollars — a bargain in these days of barnumed theatre prices. When the play was shown last season, the cost was double, but by virtue of Donald Wolfit's portrayal of the leading role amply worth it. To get it for only half that amount (indeed less, if tickets for the subsequent pair of productions were bought simultaneously) was to get it for no more than was currently demanded in the sidestreet restaurants for a small lamb chop. Ferrer may not have been as wholly satisfactory in the role as Wolfit, but he was good enough. Whorf's Mosca to a degree, John Carradine's Voltore, Fred Stewart's Corbaccio, and Le Roi Operti's Corvino all fitted into the version's frame. And most of the rest of the cast did not much interfere with the evening's rampageous tone.

It may seem that I am making some allowances, as I have previously noted is often the critical practice, for the imposed economy of the production. I am making less than may be suspected. I have seen productions that cost four times as much which, if more strictly obedient to the text, were not so amusing.

Among the colleagues who sternly protested the aforesaid liberties taken with the play was one whose review

took the somewhat greater liberty of observing that "it is Voltore who is willing to give over his own virtuous wife to Volpone in his eagerness to inherit the miser's gold."

The company's second bill in its series of three presentations, also for a two weeks' engagement, was a revival of Patrick Hamilton's *Angel Street*, with Ferrer and Whorf in the principal male roles and Uta Hagen in the principal female. Though the performance was a fairly competent one, there was considerable critical regret that any such ambitious enterprise should have followed Jonson with a purely commercial showshop offering.

HARVEST OF YEARS. JANUARY 12, 1948

A play by DeWitt Bodeen. Produced by Arthur J. Beckhard for 16 performances in the Hudson Theatre.

PROGRAM

ASTRID BROMARK		ANNA BROMARK	<i>Esther Dale</i>
	<i>Virginia Robinson</i>	MELLIE BROMARK	<i>Emily Noble</i>
BERTHA BROMARK	<i>Phillipa Bevans</i>	MARGARETA BROMARK	
JENNY NELSON	<i>Lenka Peterson</i>		<i>Leona Maricle</i>
CHRIS BROMARK	<i>Russell Hardie</i>	JULES BROMARK	<i>Philip Abbott</i>
BERNHARD JONSON	<i>Robert Crawley</i>		

SYNOPSIS: *The entire action of the play takes place in the Bromark parlor in a farmhouse in San Joaquin Valley, California. Act I. Scene 1. Late afternoon on a day in midsummer, 1946. Scene 2. Fifteen minutes later. Act II. Scene 1. A night, the following October. Scene 2. Afternoon of Christmas Day. Act III. Late afternoon the following September.*

Director: *Arthur J. Beckhard.*

WHEN A PLAY, particularly one treating of family life, has a minimum of action and is altogether too talky, it is often the critical observation that it might much better have been a novel, which seems to me to be scarcely a respectful view to hold of the novel. Just how a poor play may automatically constitute a good or even fair novel I am obtuse enough not to understand. A good novel, true, may be made into a poor play, but that is obviously a different matter. To believe the other way 'round, however, does not appear to me to be too abundant in sense. (May I hope that the reader will not seize the occasion to detect a contradiction in my remark on a novel in connection with *Skipper Next To God*; I refrained from specifying the quality of the novel.)

Mr. Bodeen's poor play about a Swedish-American family in San Joaquin valley, California, having no more action than a dead motor and enough talk to suffice half the canon of Tirso de Molina, was thus expectedly mentioned

in several quarters as very possibly possessed of the elements of a quite nobby candidate for fiction book covers. All I can say is that if it ever appears in that form, I shall take a chance, without reading it, in proclaiming that it is just as toxic as it was as a play, and without nervousness as to wide contradiction.

"I wanted to write a play," Mr. Bodeen explained in the public prints, "which would show such events as love, birth and death taking place, but in the end they weren't the real issues, the occasions that really mattered to these people. The little moments, the so-called little moments, were what they remembered." The little moments with which Mr. Bodeen filled his play may possibly have been the moments his characters best remembered, but in the drama such moments, save they be drained through the comprehension of an accomplished playwright, seem trivial and insignificant, and banish drama from the stage. An apostrophe to a parlor lamp brought over by an old mother from Sweden, an extended molasses-pull by members of the family (the small matter that their hands might subsequently be a bit sticky seemed to be overlooked by the detail-loving Mr. Bodeen), the dreaming of a black satin dress with a string of pearls by one of the daughters — such things may have been memorable to the persons the author pictures, but one can no more make a whole play of them than one can make a novel.

"All the characters are based on members of my own family or people I know," Mr. Bodeen continued. "Whether they will ever speak to me again, I don't know." The apprehension was followed, however, by the remark that "characters can be based on real persons, but by the time imagination has come into play, they end scarcely being recognizable." Which doesn't seem to me to be bursting with logic, either.

The author's confusion in such directions is reflected in the writing of his play, which very evidently was scared at birth by Chekhov, as is indicated by various scenes like the one in which the three disconsolate girls dream of far-off things and of the fulfilment of their wishes. But the

Chekhov influence only confounds the play the more greatly, since in Bodeen's hands the Russian's technique of indirection becomes mere fogginess. He tries simultaneously to follow four tracks and ends by stumbling over all of them, with the consequence that his play impresses one as never having left the depot.

The dialogue takes such stenciled shapes as "I know how much you want a farm of your own and how fine it was of you to have stayed here with us after papa died." The dramatic invention takes such as the scene in which the young girl comes down the stairs late at night in her grandmother's old wedding dress in the hope of sentimentally affecting the young man on whom she has set her heart, to say nothing of the sudden failing of the electrical power and of the twain being left alone together in the dark. The character drawing indicates its remarkably close study in the picturing of a pregnant young woman as being irritable. And the writing, as in the case of the Levy hereinbefore mentioned, seeks to get the flavor of a French character speaking English by having him formally avoid diminutives and contractions.

The play was staged in so slowly grinding a tempo and with so many static groupings of the players that it assumed the aspect of being performed in an ice-cream freezer. Esther Dale as the venerable Swedish mother was the only member of the cast who remotely resembled a human being. The rest, however, were not to be blamed, since what the author wrote were less human beings than counterfeits of actors hopefully looking for roles that were not there.

POWER WITHOUT GLORY. JANUARY 13, 1948

A crime play by Michael Clayton Hutton. Produced by John C. Wilson and the Shuberts for 31 performances in the Booth Theatre.

PROGRAM

FLO	Joan Newell	ANNA	Hilary Liddell
MAGGIE	Marjorie Rhodes	CLIFF	Peter Murray
EDITH	Helen Misener	JOHN	Trevor Ward
EDDIE	Lewis Stringer		

SYNOPSIS: *The action takes place in the John Lords' living-room in the rear of a London shop. Act I. Scene 1. A winter evening, 5:30. Scene 2. Half an hour later. Act II. A few minutes later. Act III. An hour later.*

Director: *Chloe Gibson.*

THE PRODUCER of what is inclusively catalogued as a crime play may, if it succeeds, consider himself an exceptionally lucky man, privileged to elevate the nose at such amateurs of fortune as Lucky Baldwin, Lucky Luciano, Lucky Lou Little, and Edgar Luckenbach. Of eighty-seven such plays, whether detective, mystery or so-called psychological, produced in New York and on the road in the last baker's dozen years, all of eighty have been failures, and several of the seven that achieved runs did not in the end show any notable profits.

The collapse of so large a proportion of the mystery plays in particular, very much greater than that of any other kind, is itself, I believe, no particular mystery, since the shortcoming of the majority of them is their tediously routine pattern. Shortly after the first curtain rises, someone is found to have been murdered. The following two hours are devoted to a labored casting of suspicion on a variety of characters. And the last five minutes or so are given over to the sudden detection and exposure of the criminal. There is seldom any deviation from the mold. An

audience is as used to it, and by this time as tired of it, as it is used to and tired of having its male element's hats sat on and crushed by females who have plumped themselves into its seats to chatter with one another during the intermissions. And not only is it, including the women who sit on the hats, fed up with the stale pattern itself; it is still more fed up with wasting over two long hours for a few meagre minutes of possible excitement just before the final curtain.

What the put-upon audience very obviously wants is a departure from the all-too familiar formula, or at least a treatment of it that will give it the superficial air of being a departure. The shoppers for too many years now, come nine o'clock, have seen someone tumble to the floor, often without visible cause. They thereafter have been asked to hang around patiently until five minutes to eleven while most of the other actors in the company are either cross-questioned or scrutinized appraisingly through narrowed eyes by some alleged deductive mastermind who plainly does not know his assay from a hole in the ground. And all that they then get for their money is five minutes of explanation that the murder was committed by the last person in the cast who would conceivably have committed it in actuality.

Occasionally the audience is let in at the start on the secret of who did the foul deed and is requested to imagine that it gets its money's worth in watching the miscreant being tracked down. This is most often an even greater swindle, since not only does it eliminate the suspense of guessing who the loafer is, a thriller's best selling point, but it additionally denies the last minutes of their explanatory denouement, a thriller's second best selling point.

The customary retort to all such complaints is that they do not in any way count against a play if it is skilfully written. The retort is perfectly sound. But the answer to the perfectly sound retort is that the play seldom if ever seems to have been written with anything more creative

than a tack hammer, and, what is more, with a tack hammer that has a penchant less for nails than for the playwright's thumb. The direct consequence is that an audience is usually a dozen jumps ahead of the fumbling author, and the supplementary consequence is that the whole thing impresses it as being very silly. In the case of the routine mysteries, it laughs at the efforts of the playwrights to throw suspicion on the standardized sinister butlers, jittery household maids, wastrel sons given to liquor, wives' past lovers (customarily of foreign origin), and other such characters who from long association it appreciates will under no circumstances be revealed as the guilty ones. And it laughs just as impiously at the repeated hokum of suddenly extinguished room lights and suddenly turned on pocket flash-lights, gasps and shrieks, and all the other palpable impostures of numberless seasons. Nor is its curiosity materially improved by the plays in which the culprit is early made known to it and in which the hypothetical suspense consists in waiting until he gets his deserts. It has, alas, already seen too many wives suffer retribution for having poisoned their husbands' breakfast coffee or after-dinner brandy, too many evil old maids seized by the police for having inserted their nieces into subsequently plastered-up brick walls or into kitchen ovens, too many husbands enamoured of exotic beauties pay the penalty for having tried to do away with their legal mates. . . .

What, to repeat, is called for is something a little fresher, a little newer. The films can get away with the old stuff simply by tacking onto its end a fifteen minute sequence in which everybody in the cast jumps onto anything on wheels and chases the killer for several hundred miles. The radio apparently can also whitewash it by breaking it up after the old dime novel fashion, interrupting it with commercials about pills for nervous disorders, and stretching it out to thirteen installments, each worse than the other. The theatre, however, is confronted by a more difficult problem, since its audience is in much greater relative

part no such gull. And that is the reason why most producers of the kind of plays in question become devoted readers of the want ads.

Mr. Hutton has attempted to provide the something a little fresher and newer in a crime play (psychological division) which, though it once again identifies the murderer at its beginning, is less concerned with his being tracked down and his retribution than with the effect of the crime on the members of his family and on the young woman in love with him. But, though some of the writing and several of the scenes are holding and are assisted by able acting and suitably palpitant stage direction, the effort, after a serviceable preparatory first act, rises to a fairly taut second only to drop disastrously into a garrulous and tepid third. Theatre patrons who are satisfied only by murder plays which keep them waiting until eleven o'clock for an unsatisfactory solution could under no circumstances, even were it much better than it is, be expected to lend their trade to one of this sort. But those who are more intelligently interested in how things started than how they come out, since things in life apart from horse races and unloaded dice generally have a way of coming out much as anticipated, might be counted on to lend theirs to such a one if the rest of it were only more creditable. In my case, however, even aside from its defaults noted, there was too much additional trouble in resolving the heavy Cockney accents into intelligible English and in resolving the confusion about the part a second brother in the family seemed to have played in the murder into some intelligible meaning. But when it comes to trouble in connection with plays of the general species, you can not entirely trust me, since I usually have all kinds of it trying to persuade myself that they are in any way deserving of the attention of dramatic criticism in the first place.

Mr. Hutton's crime play brought the total of failures in the period specified to eighty-one out of eighty-eight.

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS. JANUARY 14, 1948

A comedy by Florence Ryerson and Colin Clements. Produced by Philip A. Waxman for the rest of the season's performances in the Morosco Theatre.

PROGRAM

JULIA CROMWELL	Ruth Amos	GIFFORD HAMPTON	Robin Craven
BEULAH	Leta Bonyng	VINCENT PEMBERTON	Michael Hall
LING	Tom Chung Yun	MATTHEW CROMWELL	John Archer
ADDIE CROMWELL HAMPTON		CLARISSA BLYNN CROMWELL	
	Nydia Westman		Joan Tetzl
SENATOR WILLIAM CROMWELL		MRS. TILLIE SPARKER	Doris Rich
	Carl Benton Reid	MAYOR AMBROSE TIBBETT	
LILLIAN HAMPTON	Mary Kay Jones		William Lee
NICKEY	Billy Nevard	BIRDIE	Ruth Miles
MRS. GIMBLE	Frieda Altman	ZITA	Ann Thompson
MRS. WORLEY	Marion Weeks	OPAL	Stephanie Foster

SYNOPSIS: *The entire action takes place in the winter parlor of Senator Cromwell's mansion on Nob Hill, San Francisco, in the fall of 1896. Act I. Scene 1. Afternoon in October. Scene 2. The following Sunday morning. Act II. Scene 1. Tuesday afternoon. Scene 2. Some hours later. Act III. Later that night.*

Director: Benno Schneider.

THE HANDIWORK has to do with the woman's suffrage campaign in the later years of the last century and with the effect of the hostilities on the members of a San Francisco household involved in the ruckus. Before it opened, Miss Ryerson observed to the press, "The suffragette angle is, however, just background; the play is really about the war between the sexes." Whereupon Mr. Clements, her husband and co-author, oracularized, "That fight is eternal, that fight between male and female." The profound and original mentality that went into the writing of the play was thus apparent before we had a look at it. The further originality of the authors, when we did get a look at it, was disclosed in such particulars as the wife bent on a political career to the disquiet of her mate, appropriated

from Hoyt's old farce, *A Contented Woman*; the sex strike of wives against their husbands, pilfered from *Lysistrata*; and the husbands whose names are discovered among the customers of the chatelaine of a house of ill repute, borrowed from Ludwig Thoma's *Moral*. In short, a lot of old-hat, but occasionally set at such a rakish slant that it again produces some laughter. Critically speaking, it is all pretty shabby but, like bygone burlesque, at times incorrigibly funny.

Not the least of the humorous elements of the occasion is Ralph Alswang's setting of the 1896 Nob Hill mansion bursting with miraculous horrors. It is, indeed, so outrageously amusing on its own account that I would have been even more entertained by it if the play in large part had not been going on inside it. For there are stretches between the comical passages devoted to the serious sentimental love-making of the female politician and her spouse, to some ruthlessly cute banter by a pair of love-lorn youngsters, and to supposedly hilarious drinking bouts which are hard to take and which make the springboards to the jocular aspects of the evening considerably less springy than the authors hoped. There is also a visible strain to derive humor from the eccentricities, both visual and ethical, of the past. After a while, the spectacle of a woman performing at a rococo speaking-tube, of an old-fashioned ménage as high-toned as a police whistle, and, among numerous other things, of the horrified shock of respectability at the mere mention of a red-light district becomes less the material for amusement than for a juke-box paraphrase of Hindemith's retrospective *Mathis* purveyed at the insertion of plugged nickel.

Benno Schneider, appreciating that what the authors have delivered into his hands is not a comedy but something half-way between a farce and a Minsky burlesque, has appropriately directed it in that manner. Carl Benton Reid's Senator thus properly seems to have stepped out of an old Hurtig and Seamon show, as do many of the rest of the company, the best performances in which are those of Doris Rich, excellent as the Barbary Coast madam;

Ruth Amos as the Senator's wife who finds that her sex strike is futile since what interests her elderly husband much more greatly is food; Nydia Westman as the diligently coy wife of the Senator's crony who similarly, she discovers, is considerably less interested in connubial embraces than in his newspaper and the bottle; and Robin Craven as her husband. Joan Tetzl, a comely item who once promised to develop as an actress, indicates that her later preference for the motion picture cameras has cast her features and what mobility of expression they previously had into that facial rigor mortis which passes in Hollywood for dramatic acting magnificently imbued with soul.

MAKE MINE MANHATTAN

JANUARY 15, 1948

A musical revue, with sketches and lyrics by Arnold B. Horwitt, music by Richard Lewine. Produced by Joseph M. Hyman for the rest of the season's performances in the Broadhurst Theatre.

PRINCIPALS

David Burns, Sid Caesar, Joshua Shelley, Sheila Bond, Kyle MacDonnell, Perry Bruskine, Jack Kilty, Eleanor Bagley, Max Showalter, Danny Daniels, and Hal Loman.

Director: *Hassard Short.*

SINCE MOST MUSICAL COMEDIES, which concern themselves mainly with the emotion indiscriminately called love, have little sense anyway, particularly if they are good, and since most revues, which concern themselves not even so much as in that direction, have less, they are best to be reviewed by very young men who, passionately eager to become dramatic critics, obviously have no sense at all. Archer years ago wrote, "Tragedy deliberately sets forth to remind us of the pitfalls that beset our path in life. It is, so to speak, self-consciously pathetic. How much more poignant is the unconscious pathos of the gaudy, glittering, jigging and jazzing operetta, with its 'beauty chorus,' its bouncing comedians, and its idolized prima donna, the goddess of a few lime-lit hours! It is not at the St. James's or the Haymarket, but at Daly's and the Hippodrome that I, for one, am apt to be haunted by the refrain, 'Into the night go one and all.'"

Archer was an oldish fellow when he wrote it, and he spoke for all his oldish and similarly over-sophisticated colleagues, dead or alive. He implied that age and the inclination toward gratuitous, even offensive, analysis go hand in hand, and he proved obliquely that only the beautiful blindness of youth is competent to appreciate musical

shows for what, whatever they are not, they are at least supposed to be. This is not to say, of course, that the young critic is able to appraise such shows truthfully and exactly. It is rather to say that his very inability thus to report on them *ipso facto* makes his after all the better and more logical opinion.

The older critic, for example, looks above almost everything else in a musical show for charm. Without it, however appetizing the other elements, he is disturbed to the point of pain. The younger one, on the other hand, thinks that charm robs the show of what he terms "life," that it somehow is on the effeminate side, and that what is a great deal more desirable is biff, bang, wham and zingo. The older one also no longer discovers his heart beating rapidly at the sight of chemicals counterfeiting feminine beauty, or his emotions warmed into a consuming bliss by romantic love as seen through the eyes of some plot scribbler happily married to a lady dentist, or his ears assuaged by music whose sire was a bordello piano. But to the younger man it all represents something very gay, something full of illusion, and at times, indeed, something highly artistic and extraordinarily meritorious.

When the bill takes even the less pretentious revue shape, as in the case of this *Make Mine Manhattan*, the elderly critic finds he has dined off such fare for so many years that his entertainment reflexes are not what they should be. Being one such ancient, there accordingly must be something seriously wrong with me. Though charm and several of the other desiderata are missing, I had a very good time at it. It has some amusing comedians, some comical sketches, some entertaining dance numbers, and I even saw a girl or two in it that made me feel not a day over fifty again.

Maybe it's those vitamin pills.

Since, however, it is barely possible that a chronicle of my age and the state of my libido does not constitute a sufficiently adequate account of the proceedings, I surrender to bigotry and put down the events of the evening, both entertaining and not*in chronological order.

1. "Anything Can Happen In New York." The conventional opening number, with the lyrics conventionally including the names of contemporary metropolitan personalities, which is conventionally unintelligible in view of the frantic tempo in which the words are sung, the noise made by the audience in settling itself down for the evening, and the racket made by the accompanying dancers.
2. "First Avenue Gets Ready." A sketch about the woes of a restaurant operator, humorously acted by David Burns, in trying to serve the whims of the delegates to the United Nations, most of them acted by Sid Caesar in a series of quick costume changes. Caesar in this instance, with his mimicking of various foreign languages, is amusing.
3. "Phil The Fiddler." A ballet based on an old Horatio Alger from-rags-to-riches story. Not much, and too long.
4. "Movie House In Manhattan," sung by Eleanor Bagley. A comical ditty about an elaborate Park Avenue film theatre which has everything in it for the pleasure and comfort of its patrons but a tolerable picture.
5. "Any Resemblance . . ." A merry skit about a newspaper editor's search for a new dramatic critic who will be partly deaf and suffering from poor vision and a racking cough and who will be a sufficient moron to review Broadway plays in an acceptable manner. Burns as the resigning critic and Joshua Shelley as the moron candidate are killing.
6. "Talk To Me." A numb song but a lively accompanying dance by Sheila Bond and Danny Daniels.
7. "Traftz." An hilarious song number about the food served in the tea-room restaurants (chili con carne, for example, with marshmallow sauce), hilariously rendered by Shelley.
8. "I Don't Know His Name." A sentimental song of the kind that figure prominently on radio Hit Parade programs, pleasantly delivered by Jack Kilty and an attractive girl with a resemblance to Grace Moore at twenty, Kyle MacDonnell.
9. "The Good Old Days." A waggish old-time sidewalk song and dance act by the Messrs. Burns and Caesar.

10. "Once Over Lightly." A burlesque of *Allegro*. Moderately amusing, but too long.
11. "Penny Gum Machine." A dreadful mock-serious song about the tribulations of a subway slot machine, with an obligato of physical and facial contortions and quarts of perspiration by Caesar, remindful of Zero Mostel at his best, which is horrible.
12. "Saturday Night In Central Park." A tuneful first act finale embracing the old pinwheel chorus formation and the usual hullabaloo by the vocal ensemble.

After the intermission:

1. "Ringalevio." A song and dance ensemble number in which the men and women are dressed as street kids and in which they play leap-frog, jump over fences and comport themselves generally like men and women dressed up as kids on the stage. Dull.
2. "Noises In The Street." A song number about the early morning New York din made by milkmen, street cleaners, street diggers, taxi drivers, *et al.*, drolly managed by Burns, Caesar, Shelley, and others.
3. "I Fell In Love With You." Another sentimental duet (*vide* "I Don't Know His Name") sung by the same duo in front of a backdrop picturing the East River by moonlight.
4. "My Brudder And Me." A tough, lively street dance by the Bond-Daniels team.
5. "Hollywood Heads East." A sketch showing what might happen if movies were to be made in New York. As funny a fifteen minutes as have been encountered in a revue in years, with Burns grand as an East Side garment manufacturer hired to play atmosphere in the film being shot and Caesar almost as good as the elegant director, Bruce Bigelow, who proves to be also a former East Side garment manufacturer and who stops the making of the picture to compare excited notes on the trade with Burns.
6. "Gentleman Friend." A rubber-stamp song and dance number by Miss Bond, Hal Loman, and the hoofers.

7. "Subway Song." The stale one about the girl who lives in Brooklyn and the boy who lives in the Bronx and whose love wanes because of the trouble in delivering her back to her remote address, but given some extrinsic humor by Shelley's delivery.
8. "Full Fathom Five." A jovial sketch in which, among other things, a salesman proves to the resisting Burns that a pen will write under water by undressing him and heaving him into a large tank, with Burns' comic gifts again amply demonstrated.
9. "A Night Out." A song number about the difference, chiefly monetary, between New York in 1938 and at present, performed by Caesar with even more volcanic ardor and torrential sweat than before, and equally suggestive of Mostel at his best, which is agonizing.
10. "Glad To Be Back." The finale, with the entire company, dressed in sports clothes and the scene depicting the Grand Central Station, singing, with gestures, of its ecstasy at returning to New York after a holiday.

Supplementary notes:

- (a) The more personable girls, aside from Miss MacDonnell, are, if I decipher the playbill correctly, Rhoda Johansson, Stephanie Augustine, and a decorative little number in the dancing chorus who somehow annoyingly disappears from the show after the first act.
- (b) The settings by Frederick Fox, picturing different metropolitan localities, are passable, but the costumes by Morton Haack, whose bustle period costuming for *Strange Bedfellows* the night before was to be commended as the *derrière cri*, are, except for some in the second act finale, cheaply unimaginative.
- (c) Hassard Short's direction, patterned after the speed technique of George Abbott, appropriately serves the occasion, though his stage lighting seems better adapted to a Leon and Eddie's cabaret show than to a revue with professional pretensions.

THE MEN WE MARRY. JANUARY 16, 1948

A comedy by Elisabeth Cobb and Herschel Williams. Produced by Edgar F. Luckenbach, Jr., for 3 performances in the Mansfield Theatre.

PROGRAM

MAGGIE WELCH	Shirley Booth	JULIE MADISON	Marta Linde
PHILLIP	David Anderson	MARK KENNICOTT	John William
WARREN THROCKMORTON		LEDA MALLARD	Doris Dalton
	Robert Willey	NED SNYDER	Joseph Allen, Jr.
GWENNIE	Margaret Hamilton	MARY	Anne Sarger
DR. ALAN LAMBERT	Neil Hamilton	PETER STERLING	John Hudson

SYNOPSIS: *Entire action of the play takes place in the home of Maggie Welch, located in a fashionable section of Maryland. Time: The present. Mid-summer. Act I. A Saturday morning. Act II. Scene 1. A hour later. The same day. Scene 2. That evening. Act III. Scene 1. Two a.m. The following morning. Scene 2. Eight a.m. Same day.*

Director: Martin Manulis.

WHENEVER, outside the theatre, I can not get to sleep at nights, I no longer count sheep, having found that that particular exercise in arithmetic does nothing to woe slumber, probably because of the bothersome agility of the animals and the touching look of sadness on their faces. What I presently count is something much more monotonous and immeasurably more auspicious as a soporific: the characters I have regularly encountered down the year in such Broadway comedies as this. I lie down, close my eyes, and successively number them, and in little more time than it takes to say Elisabeth Cobb and Herschel Williams I am fast in the arms of Morpheus.

There they parade in all their frozen doldrums: the smart divorcée with a train of husbands in her wake whose cynical banter is supposed to constitute such wit as has not been heard from a stage since the death of Congreve; the lady novelist who is admired by the other character for her great womanly wisdom on the score of having writ

ten such epigrammatic profundities as "Marriage is the death of love"; her suave New York publisher, generally cast with an English actor, who professes to be done with the female sex but who is obviously doomed to marry his fair client in the last act; and the ingénue who, like her young swain with the rumpled hair and loosely knotted tie, gags at the sophistication and flippancy of the other members of the houseparty and wants only to settle down and have babies. Also the comedy household maid descendant of May Vokes; the society medico ever in impeccable habiliments and squirting manly charm who perches himself on chair arms and sofa ends and paternally counsels the ladies; the fluttery female nitwit interested in politics; the small boy devoted to the comic strips who makes his exits at top speed whooping like an Indian; and so on.

The frame for the characters in this elegant case is a country house "located in a fashionable section of Maryland," which as presented is as full of tone as a fish-horn. The plot has to do with the several women's attempt to discourage the ingénue from marrying the poor young man of her choice in favor of one with money. The writing was unmistakably done under water and is consistently wet. The direction could not have been better, for floor-walkers in a department store. The actors were helpless in the face of things. And Donald Oenslager's country house setting, to say nothing of his lavender lighting of the Maryland countryside seen through the doors and windows, was admirably suited to the kind of musical comedy that closes on the Saturday night of its out-of-town tryout.

P.S. On only a single occasion has counting the characters in such plays not operated toward slumber. That was on the night I had had ten cups of after-dinner coffee. On that night, I began counting the stereotyped situations in the same plays and I had not got beyond the one in which the men shake cocktails and consider their strategy against the women before I was happily sound asleep.

THE SURVIVORS. JANUARY 19, 1948

A play by Peter Viertel and Irwin Shaw. Produced by Bernard Hart and Martin Gabel for 8 performances in the Playhouse.

PROGRAM

RUTSON HEDGE	Marc Lawrence	JODINE DECKER	Hume Cronyn
ROY CLEMENS	Russell Collins	MARCUS HEDGE	Edwin M. Bruce
ALCOTT	Neil Fitzgerald	LEONARD HAWKES	Kenneth Tobey
FINLAY DECKER	E. G. Marshall	REVEREND HOYT	Guy Arbury
VINCENT KEYES	Louis Calhern	SHERIFF BAGLEY	Tom Hoier
TOM CAMERON	Anthony Ross		Edith Rand
STEVE DECKER	Richard Basehart	TOWNSPEOPLE	Ray Walston
MORGAN DECKER	Kevin McCarthy		Edgar Small
JANE DECKER	Jane Seymour		Eugene Steiner
LUCY DUNNE	Marianne Stewart		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *The Court Hotel, Decker City, Missouri. An early summer afternoon in 1865.* Act II. *Veranda of the Decker ranch. That evening.* Act III. *Same as Act I. That night.*

Director: Martin Gabel.

OF CO-AUTHOR Mr. Viertel I know nothing save that he is a writer of Hollywood movies which I have not seen and of a novel which I have not read. Of Mr. Shaw I know considerably more. Not only has he written a number of plays which, while remiss in other directions, have at least indicated a sense of valid theme and an intermittently intelligent approach, but he has to his credit a number of very able short stories, among them the irresistibly murderous *Sailor Off The Bremen* and the delicately cognitive *The Girls In Their Summer Dresses*. I also know of him that, though he lately himself had become a practitioner of drama criticism, he does not like drama critics, in which attitude he may hardly be said, if eavesdropping has been proficient, to be strikingly original. However, I do not much blame him. There are times when I even do not like myself, and this is one of them.

The reasons for my lack of self-idolatry are two. In the first place, Mr. Shaw magnanimously exempted me from his recent dismissal of the critical fraternity as no better than a pack of half-witted micrococci, and this naturally prejudices me to regard him as an extremely intelligent and fastidious gentleman, fit to be ranked with Socrates, Hegel and Kant, to say nothing of in the punctilious company of Lord Chesterfield and the Emperor Franz Josef. And, in the second embarrassing place, the play on which he has here collaborated is not anywhere nearly so good as I should like it to be and thus enable me to bestow upon it a truckload of reciprocal admiration, bursting with adjectives of gaudy and voluptuous hue.

Finding myself in this awkward predicament is scarcely a pleasure or a comfort. Here I sit saying to myself that it is a shame I can not trim my remarks in such a manner as to give the impression that the play is not as poor as it really is and so in small part pay back Mr. Shaw for his testimonial to my talents. Here I sit telling myself that this critical business becomes a damned nuisance when it imposes on me the impoliteness of taking a crack at someone who has gone out of his way to say genteel things about me. But here nevertheless I sit and go about bounderishly putting down on paper that Mr. Shaw's play, despite the highest of intentions (I'll get that in anyway) and despite a couple of well-handled scenes (I'll get that in too), is an overly talky, platitudinous and melodramatically shaky one that remains at bottom, for all its worthy idealism (I'll get that in also), a movie horse opera without a horse.

At this point, blushing with mortification over having to say such things about so amiable a man's work, I shall take refuge in a little trickery, possibly very unfair, and self-consolingly attribute a substantial share of the play's deficiencies to Mr. Shaw's collaborator, Mr. Viertel. My excuses for the conceivably unmerited detraction are that the latter's name figures ahead of Mr. Shaw's in the authorship credit line, thus intimating that the major part of the job was his, and that, unlike Mr. Shaw, this is his

maiden attempt at playwriting. (I feel a little more at ease now, though I am not too sure that I should.) But wherever the greater portion of the blame may rest, the unwelcome fact remains that the play is as obviously short of its purpose as a shrunk undershirt.

What the collaborators have attempted to write is a melodrama drawing a parallel between the bellicose bitterness and hatred that enveloped the post-Civil War period and the same bitterness and hatred that prevail in the world today. And what they have essayed to sieve through their stage alarms is a convincing argument that bloodshed never succeeds in accomplishing what calm meditation may. Yet what they have achieved, in spite of their parable perspiration, is merely a gun-feud screen Western involving the usual cattle ranch, water hole, drawling sheriff, whiskey guzzling, and dragged-in love interest and supposedly made suitable to the dramatic stage by incorporating into it some noble rhetorical splurges on the uselessness of killing and the greater practicality of a brotherhood of man. In short, something that is neither the Hatfield nor the McCoy.

It doesn't work, and for a transparent reason. Not only is the blood and thunder element too hackneyed to hold an audience on its own, but the homilies which have been inserted into it would interrupt and repudiate the effect of even a melodrama ten times better. There is one precept about straight melodrama that only rarely may be disregarded, and that is never for a moment to retard its action. Even something as fine as Hamlet's second monologue, if somehow worked into a melodrama as good as *Secret Service* or *Sherlock Holmes*, would knock the pins from under it. And when you get oratory which, like that in this one, may be allowed to be scarcely up to any such standard, it not only knocks the pins from under it but jumps on it and tramples the life out of it. When the last curtain of *The Survivors* falls, you accordingly feel that for two and one-half long hours you have been watching nothing more than Henry Wallace in a Broadway shooting gallery.

Inside abundantly realistic settings by Boris Aronson

picturing the interior and exterior of Missouri frontier shacks, Martin Gabel has directed the rumpus into such an overdose of physical tension that it is a wonder the actors do not collapse from a wholesale thrombosis at the half-way point. In the role of the perplexed feudist torn between his zeal to pot his enemy neighbor and his sense of honor, Richard Basehart so postures and fascinatedly listens to his vocal tones that one suspects he imagines the evening's bill is *Lucia di Lammermoor* and that he is Enrico in pursuit of the foul Edgardo. Louis Calhern does as well as possible by the Wallace speeches; Hume Cronyn comports himself like a man of forty in seventy-year-old whiskers; Russell Collins plays the bartender with such a surplus of fidgets that the saloon seems to be located somewhere on Angel Street; and E. G. Marshall acts the persistently nosey and snooping brother as if he were shadowing an illicit asafetida cache.

The rest, except for Neil Fitzgerald in a minor part, are not much better, though direction in all cases may be responsible. Anthony Ross screams his lines as if his role were mugging him; Kevin McCarthy plays the mortally ill brother role as if it were a trumpet operated by a blast furnace; and the two ladies of the company, Jane Seymour and Marianne Stewart, contrastingly deliver their few lines like instructed wax-works.

Addendum: Report had it that George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, among others, had attended the rehearsals of the play and had suggested various changes in the original script, all of which were accepted by the authors.

THE LAST DANCE. JANUARY 27, 1948

An adaptation of Strindberg's The Dance Of Death by Peter Goldbaum and Robin Short. Produced by Theatre Associates, Inc., for 7 performances in the Belasco Theatre.

PROGRAM

EDGAR	Oscar Homolka	JUDITH	Anne Jackson
ALICE	Jessie Royce Landis	ALAN	Richard Hylton
CURTIS	Philip Bourneuf		

SYNOPSIS: *The action of the play takes place on a small, semi-tropical island which could be the colonial possession of any country. Time: 1910. Act I. The major's living quarters inside an old fortress. Act II. Villa Belle Vue, residence of the health supervisor, the following spring. Act III. Same as Act II, two weeks later.*

Director: John O'Shaughnessy.

THE MM. GOLDBAUM AND SHORT, hatchers of this *The Last Dance*, have taken Strindberg's forty-seven year old, two-part *The Dance Of Death*, one of the most searing plays in all modern drama, and have turned it into something closely resembling a whimsical *pas de deux*. If there is a play that presents with more horrifying effect what bitterness and acrimony can accomplish between two human beings, I do not know of it. If, on the contrary, there is one that more greatly shows the horrifying effect of adapting any such work to the supposed taste of a contemporary audience, I also do not know of it. What the MM. Goldbaum and Short have done, in brief, is to remove the sting of a cobra in order to make it available for a sideshow. As snake charmers, accordingly, they are frauds. It is not that they have departed radically from Strindberg's externals. They have, in fact, stuck pretty close to them. The characters are outwardly much the same; the thematic and plot outlines in large part follow the original; and the setting remains a fortified island, if in this case one in the semi-tropics instead of one off the coast of Sweden. But what

they have executed on the innards of the play amounts to a gall-bladder operation performed with a sherbet spoon.

Strindberg, whose own experiences had bred in him a murderous hatred of marriage, wrote into his play not merely an indictment of it as a human institution, as Professor Frank Chandler observed thirty-odd years ago, but even as a natural union. Where, as the professor noted, Lord Beaconsfield protested against it because "It destroys one's nerves to be amiable every day to the same human being," the Scandinavian lemon-sucker contrarily objected to it because, as he viewed it, it is torturing to be every day malevolent and rancorous toward the same person. And his heinous married pair thus exceeded, as cancer exceeds barber's itch, Sydney Smith's comparison of a husband and wife to a pair of scissors so joined that they can not be separated, often moving in opposite directions, yet always punishing any who come between them.

Contemplating the Swede's spouse and mate scheming against and screaming at each other in a savage mutual antipathy and not resting until the man is undone by a stroke and the wife defeated even then by the chains that still bind her to him is to see the flesh sliced from both with the keenest of psychological scalpels. It is a spectacle at once terrible and, in its terribleness, profound in eccentric but searching revelation. The dramatist spares nothing; the play lays his two principal characters on an operating table and opens them up to dialogue as rumbling with thunder as Strauss' *Zarathustra* yet equally as illuminated by lightning flashes. And when it ends, one exhaustedly feels that about the only way possible to get any relative relief is to dash out onto the street, grab a car, and run over a dozen or two children. In the case of *The Last Dance*, on the other hand, one feels like running over the authors. In place of Strindberg's thunder they have shaken a tin-sheet, and in place of his lightning they have tossed about a lot of lighted punk-sticks. They jab hair-pins into the characters where Strindberg jabbed harpoons, and where he turned an acetylene torch on them they have turned a pocket flashlight. What we get, conse-

quently, is the original play largely as he might have told it to George Kelly. The blinding psychopathology now wears dark spectacles; the merciless probing is now only skin-deep. The drama's old dress is there, but there is nothing under it but the drama's skeleton, loudly rattling its bones, like a Scandinavian minstrel show.

As with a wild locomotive or mad bull, it would take some big doing wholly to arrest the furious energy of such a play and the adapters have not entirely succeeded. A small measure of it persists in spite of their efforts to flag it or bury its horns in the ground. But their hope of fashioning a commercial play out of one that is about as commercial as prussic acid remains still a hope, and a very foolish one. It is a thankless enterprise to try to make acceptable the work of a dramatist who was cherished by a Nietzsche to audiences who cherish a Tennessee Williams.

It was, however, not necessary to wait until the curtain went up to appreciate what we were due to be in for. The dramatic mentality and theatrical education promoting the enterprise were sufficiently indicated in a statement published in the press in advance of the play's opening by a spokesman for the adapters and producers. "The adapters," it proclaimed, "believe they have come closer to the dramatist's intentions than any literal transcription could bring them. They have treated *Dödsdansen* [*The Dance Of Death*] as a satire (!) on the frustrations of the marriage relationship, not as a straight drama." "The fact remains," it continued in extenuation, "that everything of Strindberg's ever produced in New York has run for a combined total of only eighty performances," and listed as the sole plays produced *The Dance Of Death*, *The Spook Sonata*, *The Father*, and *The Bridal Crown*. "The record," it lamented, "is a melancholy one." Not only has the combined total New York run of the Strindberg plays mentioned far exceeded the figure named, but the plays were not the only ones that have seen metropolitan production. Others, both long and short, have been *Comrades*, *Countess Julie*, *The Stronger*, *Easter*, *Swanwhite*, and *The Dream Play*.

"For the adapters," the statement warned us finally, "the play is a maiden effort. Each, however, has written separately before, Mr. Goldbaum for the films and Mr. Short for the radio. They met in Hollywood."

A general air of carelessness enveloped almost everything connected with the production. Though the period of the play was 1910, the costuming of at least one male character was 1948 in its broad-lapeled tropical wardrobe, pleated evening trousers, and dress shoes, and the reference to "dinner jackets" was only one of several anachronisms. A pair of love-birds in a cage, hung in one setting, were permitted so constantly and loudly to chirp their admiration for each other that two of the serious scenes between the wrangling husband and wife were given a burlesque counterpoint. The lovelorn ingénue was allowed so to shout her lines that the immediately subsequent outbursts of the male protagonist seemed almost pianissimo. And so on. Even the press agent's program notes were awry. "Jessie Royce Landis," read one, "vowed never to play the same type of role twice in succession when she first started her acting career and has lived up to the vow." Only the season before, Miss Landis played much the same type of role as in this play in *Little A*.

The acting company was best served by Oscar Homolka who, though Strindberg would not even remotely have recognized the husband character he played, at least played it proficiently as the adapters strangely conceived it. Miss Landis portrayed the envenomed wife mostly by affecting what Anna Held used to call ze wickaid smile and ze saucy eye and by issuing from time to time a small sardonic chuckle, meanwhile rolling an imaginary caraway seed on her tongue. Philip Bourneuf, as the husband's friend for whom the wife has set her cap, continued, as is his habit, to read his lines through a tightly set mouth, the while attempting to organize his larynx into an approximation to a vibra-harp. Anne Jackson, in the role of the couple's young daughter, evidently mistook the role, with the director's permission, for a combination hurdle race and cheering section and leaped up steps and over furniture

with such vigor, accompanied by what seemed to be college yells, that the old Hippodrome management would surely have signed her up at sight. Richard Hylton, as the friend's son beloved of Miss Jackson, on the other hand was directed to comport himself as if the play were being acted inside a large cake of ice. And when the stage doings now and then lapsed for a moment into a measure of tranquillity, all save Homolka and Hylton, who at least was consistent, appeared elegantly to imagine that the setting of the play was Chichester-on-Chich.

LOOK, MA, I'M DANCIN'! JANUARY 29, 1948

A musical show, based on an idea by Jerome Robbins, with book by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, music and lyrics by Hugh Martin. Produced by George Abbott for the rest of the season's performances in the Adelphi Theatre.

PROGRAM

WOTAN	Don Liberto	VLADIMIR LUBOFF	
LARRY	Loren Welch	Alexander March	
DUSTY LEE	Alice Pearce	LILY MALLOY	Nancy Walker
ANN BRUCE	Janet Reed	MR. GLEEB	James Lane
SNOW WHITE	Virginia Gorski	MR. FERBISH	Eddie Hodge
EDDIE WINKLER	Harold Lang	TANYA'S PARTNER	Raul Celada
TOMMY	Tommy Rall	BELL BOY	Dean Campbell
F. PLANCEK	Robert Harris	STAGE MANAGER	Dan Sattler
TANYA DRINSKAYA		SUZY	Sandra Deel
	Katharine Sergava		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Pennsylvania Station. New York City.* Scene 2. *On tour.* Scene 3. *A rehearsal hall. Joplin, Mo.* Scene 4. *On tour.* Scene 5. *Hotel room. Amarillo, Tex.* Scene 6. *Outside a theatre. Phoenix, Ariz.* Scene 7. *Stage door of the Philharmonic Auditorium. Los Angeles.* Scene 8. *Back stage of the Philharmonic.* Scene 9. *Stage of the Philharmonic.* Act II. Scene 1. *A railroad platform. Glendale, Calif. Early the next morning.* Scene 2. *A Pullman car.* Scene 3. *On tour.* Scene 4. *A theatre basement. Des Moines, Iowa.*

Directors: George Abbott and Jerome Robbins.

THOUGH THE SHOW discloses Jerome Robbins considerably beneath his top form, there is nevertheless enough evidence in it to indicate that his is still the freshest choreographic imagination to have come into the theatre in some time. To a stage that over the years slowly progressed from the merry village maidens' arch leg-work, if not the chorus pinwheel formations, to the great heights of ballets consisting primarily in bad imitations of the real article bathed in welcomely concealing deep purple lights, he has brought, if sometimes at the expense of beauty, a catching

wit and humor combined with a genuine dramatic inventiveness. He has in the process happily and further done away with most of such routine ballet business as simultaneously elevates dancers into the air and depresses audiences into their seats, with all the solemn gazelle posturings, and, in another direction, with that unvarying excess of speed which tends doubly to slow up a show between the dance numbers. In place of all such dingdong he has managed a satirical cartoonery, an unsentimental Saroyanism, and an intoxicated fancy that, at its best, in numbers like the speakeasy era item in *Billion Dollar Baby* or the Keystone cops ballet in *High-Button Shoes*, has swept the dry dance dust from the stage with a bright new broom. In the present show he is not, to repeat, at his fittest, but what little merit in it there is remains his. The music, lyrics and book by the Messrs. Martin, Lawrence and Lee are shy on fizz. Nancy Walker, who heads the cast, is undoubtedly an able performer, in her peculiar line, but two and a half hours of female brassiness are a little too much for an old Marilyn Miller man like myself. George Abbott has done everything possible to get some life into the book, but the job he is up against is like trying to inject effervescence into a bottle of linseed oil. And, additionally, a musical show without charm, unless it has enough other gifts to make me forget the absence of it, always looks to me like an unlighted Christmas tree.

Just before his death last year at the age of eighty-one, Tristan Bernard, the champion French farce writer, confessed that, for all his international reputation as a humorist, he was at a loss to know just what it is that constitutes humor. Asked to venture a definition anyway, he replied, "When a man falls out of a tenth story window and on the way down says, 'Well, no bones broken so far,' that would appear to be humor. But if Einstein, seeing the man fall, asks, 'Is it the man who is going down or the ground that is coming up?' and concludes, after some thought, that there is no conclusive answer, that, it seems, is not humor but metaphysics."

Exactly what constitutes humor may, as Bernard said,

be a moot point. But there can be no moot point about what is made to pass for humor in this show. That is, unless one esteems as funny such favorite jocosities of Mr. Abbott as the spectacle of a nauseated woman clapping her hand to her mouth and rushing to the lavatory, the sudden pulling open of a lavatory door and the disclosure of a character in a private posture, the view of a chubby female bending over a bed and so constringing her petticoat that her buttocks take on the picture of a hippopotamus' rear, or contortive female comics who sing their numbers as if they were the offspring of frigate sailors and who filially shiver their timbres.

The plot has to do with the stage-struck daughter of a rich brewer who backs a ballet company in order to get a role in it. The music is as loud as a buzz-saw, and equally invested with melodic quality. The lyrics are dusty shelf-goods with the old "Gotta Dance" and "If You'll be Mine" labels. The settings by Oliver Smith are commonplace and for extra measure include the one in a Pullman sleeper with the transparent berth curtains. The costumes by John Pratt look as if they cost at least fifty dollars in toto. Harold Lang is an agreeable juvenile and apt with his feet, but the rest of the troupe, which may have hidden talents, successfully conceal them.

KATHLEEN. FEBRUARY 3, 1948

A comedy by Michael Sayers. Produced by Bea Lawrence for 2 performances in the Mansfield Theatre.

PROGRAM

THE HOUSEKEEPER: LILY	THE DAUGHTER: KATHLEEN
Anita Bolster	FOGARTY Andree Wallace
THE PRIEST: FATHER KEOGH	THE RICH MAN'S SON: SEAMUS
Whitford Kane	MACGONIGAL Henry Jones
THE POOR MAN'S SON: CHRISTY	THE SOLDIER: LIEUTENANT
HANAFEY James McCallion	AENGUS MACOGUE
THE DOCTOR: DR. HORATIO	Whitfield Connor
HOUHLIHAN Frank Merlin	THE RICH BOY'S FATHER: JAMIE
THE FATHER: PROFESSOR JASPER	MACGONIGAL Morton L. Stevens
FOGARTY Jack Sheehan	

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Noon. Act II. *A little later.* Act III. *Still a little later.*

Scene: *The living-room-study in Professor Fogarty's house not far from the city of Dublin.*

Time: *The action of the play takes place in a single day.*

Director: *Coby Ruskin.*

AS IN SEVERAL other Irish plays still praying for local production, Mr. Sayers' central character is a young girl touched in the head, but where the other plays are solemn about the brain condition this one is collaterally light-minded and seeks to extract amusement instead of sympathetic pain. As in at least two dozen others, Irish, American or what not, it also has the girl pretend that she is pregnant by an unidentified male, which, speaking of amusement, may no longer be said to be particularly amusing. And, as in a number of short stories encountered over the years, the girl writes love letters to herself in the name of a handsome fellow whom she casually met at a party. It will thus dawn upon even the more backward that Mr. Sayers' imagination and invention are a little short of revolutionary.

The management, evidently appreciating that what it

had bought was short-weight, caused its press-agent to send out in advance of the opening (and quick closing) the big news that there was a lot more to the play than anyone would see and that it was at bottom not just the bad comedy that everyone would see but a sly allegory about Ireland itself, full of rich meaning. The only rich meaning that everyone subsequently did see, and clearly, was that, allegory or no allegory, the management was in for an immediate loss of its sixty thousand dollar investment.

The press-agent's brain-child, however, merits quotation for the record. "With *Kathleen*," it confided, "Mr. Sayers satirically carries on a tradition of generations of Irish poets who, through the long period of British rule when the writing of political propaganda was forbidden, kept alive the identity of the nation through the device of love songs to Kathleen ni Houhlihan. So numerous were these allegorical plays, written by Yeats, AE, Pearse and other Irish authors, that a 'Kathleen play' is a recognized form in Irish literature. In the play which opens this evening, Mr. Sayers through farce and romance tells in human symbols the story of modern Ireland. Kathleen is Ireland herself, the Kathleen ni Houhlihan of the ancient poets. Although she will be billed on the program as Kathleen Fogarty, Mr. Sayers points out that her mother was a Houhlihan; that she has three fathers, representing history, religion and science; and that she is claimed in marriage by three suitors — a rich man's son, a poor man's son and an engineer — symbolic of types of modern Ireland."

It is, of course, remotely possible that Mr. Sayers had the allegorical idea in his mind before the press-agent put it there, but, if so, it would take a deductive mind superior to that of any theatre audience, however sleuthy, to figure it out in connection with his play. That it was a desperate after-thought is much more likely, since the speech of the doctor character to the effect that "some poetic fellow may see an allegory in all this, but a man like me can't" has every sound of having been belatedly, guardedly and whim-

sically incorporated into the script, from which it protrudes like a traffic policeman's thumb.

Even were the play fifty times better than it is, the direction by Coby Ruskin would have murdered it. Mr. Ruskin's idea of pace seemed to consist in having the characters make all their entrances on the breathlessly excited run as if they were about to announce that there was a fire back-stage, and all their exits as if they were on their way to put it out. The leading role was played by a comely novice, Andree Wallace, whose every move, gesture and eye-blink Mr. Ruskin so sedulously over-directed that the poor girl was made to perform like Charlie McCarthy's sister in the grip of an alternately dreamy and fighting jag. The other actors, some of them naturally baleful, suffered further and no less, and the occasion in sum resolved itself into a secondary allegory, unmistakable, about what happens in the theatre when all-around incompetence rears its head.

A CHEKHOV BILL. FEBRUARY 5, 1948

Four short comedies by Anton Chekhov: A Tragedian In Spite Of Himself, The Bear, On The Harmfulness Of Tobacco, and The Wedding. Produced by the New York City Theatre Company for 2 weeks' performances in the City Center Theatre.

CAST

José Ferrer, Richard Whorf, John Carradine, Frances Reid, Robert Carroll, Phyllis Hill, Francis Letton, Paula Lawrence, Victor Thorley, Will Kuluva, Grace Coppin, Ralph Roberts, and Leonardo Cimino.

Directors: José Ferrer and Richard Barr.

PROTRACTED USAGE often lends a connotation to terms which clouds them. Thus, for one example, fig-leaf suggests to the popular mind no longer so much the foliage of the moraceous genus *Ficus* as something which since Biblical times has served art and the less audacious burlesque strip-teasers as a covering for the genital organs, widely regarded as biologically indecent. And thus, for a second, Russian drama suggests something closely identifiable with cancer, tuberculosis and lingering death, in a dark and gloomy clinical ward. It is only lately that another view has gradually and with difficulty overcome the prejudiced conception and that a small portion of the theatregoing public has learned to its astonishment that Russian drama, like that of other lands, has its share of comedy along with the sombre.

The present bill of Chekhov short plays was designed to further the enlightenment and, though the humor in them is sometimes debatable, the evening at least testifies to the error that for so long, and in the face of comedies ranging all the way from Katayev's *Squaring The Circle*, produced many years ago, to the more recent Simonov's *The Whole World Over*, has held sway. Chekhov composed the four vaudevilles under consideration in his very

early writing days and they amount to little, though in one or two of them there are hints of his later mature studies. And, with the passing of time, they have taken on a thematic aridity and even a flavor of the amateurish. But they nevertheless, to repeat, are serviceable, whatever their destitution, in indicating the humorous facets in a national drama that generally has been thought to be wholly without them.

A Tragedian In Spite Of Himself is a monologue disguised as not one by having a second actor sit at a table and nod from time to time while he listens to the harangue of another. This other narrates for twenty-five minutes the woes of having to shop in the city for his wife and neighbors, to the accompaniment of the old comedy moxie of arms full of bundles which are constantly dropping from his grasp. It cries for a low comedian like the late W. C. Fields to give it any life, a job which Richard Whorf finds beyond his means. His efforts to distil amusement from a wildly disarrayed collar and other such vaudeville properties come to naught.

The Bear tells of an uncouth land-owner who comes to demand the payment of a debt incurred by a widow's spouse, of his loud denunciation of the lady and of womanhood in general, and of his final amorous surrender to her charms. Its humor is negligible and would call for the ministrations of a Bobby Clark to encourage it. José Ferrer is able to do little with it.

On The Harmfulness Of Tobacco is a monologue by a henpecked husband on the agonies of his thirty-three years of married life. It combines comedy with pathos and in spots is closer to Chekhov's later character delineations. Ferrer comes off pretty well in this instance.

The Wedding presents the picture of a wedding feast in a snide restaurant, with the snobbish bride's mother's efforts to give it some tone by hiring a military magnifico to lend his presence to it. It has some amusing moments, especially those in which the bogus magnifico, a drooling octogenarian, bores the assemblage with technical details of his craft and those in which an inarticulate Greek tries

to make a speech explaining the relations of his native land with Russia. Whorf as the ancient and Will Kuluva as the Greek assist in the promotion of what drollery there is.

On the whole, however, the little plays are much too long for their content and, except for the *Tobacco* monologue and parts of *The Wedding*, I prefer the economy of the late Tristan Bernard's *The Exile*, recorded as the shortest play ever to have seen production. The scene is a frontier cabin. Sitting at the fireplace is a mountaineer. A knock at the door is heard. He opens it and a man rushes in. The dialogue:

Exile: "Whoever you are, have pity on a hunted man. There is a price on my head."

Mountaineer: "How much?"

Curtain

A LONG WAY FROM HOME

FEBRUARY 8, 1948

An adaptation of Gorki's The Lower Depths by Randolph Goodman and Walter Carroll. Produced by the Experimental Theatre, Inc., for 6 performances in the Maxine Elliott Theatre.

PROGRAM

DUKE	Henry Scott	JOEBUCK	Josh White
BESSIE	Virginia Girvin	MARCY	Ruby Dee
DEE	Harry Bolden	PREACHER	Alonzo Bosan
LILY	Mildred Smith	BILLY-BOY	James Wright
MARY	Beatrice Wade	CELINE	Fredi Washington
FOUR-EYES	Catherine Ayers	COTTON	Earl Sydnor
SILKY	Maurice Ellis	CYRIL	Ken Renard
SAD-ACT	William Marshall	STUD	Joseph James
GRADY HORN	Augustus Smith	BARTENDER	Eric Burroughs

SYNOPSIS: *The action of the play takes place in a basement lodging house, under a poolhall on the outskirts of Durham, N. C. The time is the present. Act I. Scene 1. Basement of Grady Horn's. A spring morning. Scene 2. The same. That night. Act II. Scene 1. The backyard. Evening. Several days later. Scene 2. Same as Act I. Night, a few weeks later.*

Director: Alan Schneider.

WHENEVER THE LATE Florenz Ziegfeld was at a loss what to do in one of his *Follies*, it was his wont to bring on the girls. Whenever a producer, whether of musicals or drama, is nowadays at a similar loss for an idea, he brings on the Negroes. It is thus that we have had them in everything from Aristophanes to Shakespeare, from Gilbert and Sullivan to Shaw, and from *The Show-Off* to *Arsenic And Old Lace*, not to mention in various shaky new play and show scripts originally intended for white actors which have been sanguinely hocus-pocused into vehicles for black. We have also had numerous singular adaptations of plays both ancient and modern, some going to such extremes as, in the instance of *Anna Lucasta*, con-

verting Polish characters into Negroes and in other instances presenting blacks as even High Church British. It will probably be any day now that some producer will get the notion that the Black and Tans must have been Ethiopians and will bequeath us O'Casey's *The Plough And The Stars* with an Afroyank cast.

The presentation of a version of Gorki's *The Lower Depths* which transplants the scene from Russia to North Carolina and alters the Muscovite characters into Dixie Negroes accordingly has about the same daring experimental value as pouring ketchup on beans. The enterprise, indeed, seems to be directed less toward any real experiment than toward the possible chance, if it were to indicate any signs of box-office life, of moving it over to Broadway and cashing in. A modern classic has been turned into a minor showshop item; a drama of Russian character, Russian viewpoint and Russian soul has been worked into a Catfish Row entertainment, minus only a score.

The friendly contention in these cases is that, after all, human beings are at bottom much alike and that consequently there is nothing particularly violative of such a play as Gorki's in changing its characters from Russians to American Negroes. It is a pretty argument, one will admit, but I still am harassed by the peculiar notion that the Chinese, let us say, differ somewhat from the Scandinavians and even the Slavs from Durham, N. C., blacks. There are, of course, superficial identities in nations and races, but the identities stop there; and to adapt, however freely, a drama that is essentially as Slavic as Gorki's to a people approximately as Slavic as corn pone is almost as far-fetched as adapting *Lady Windermere's Fan* to such persons as figure in *Tobacco Road*.

It is a further friendly point that, in order to enjoy any such adaptation, one should dismiss the original play from mind and accept the presentation simply on its own. I have the weakness to confess that I am not up to any such agreeable suspension of judgment. If the bill of the evening is specifically stated to be an adaptation of *The*

Lower Depths, I somehow keep thinking of *The Lower Depths* and not of any completely independent effort. The problem of dismissing Gorki, or even of being conscious of him at only widely spaced intervals, is beyond me; and I suspect that it would be the same if the authors were to appropriate the Russian without credit and offer the exhibit as their own.

It is all very well and proper for college boys to undertake such adaptation pranks for their annual shows, but it is hardly justifiable in the case of an organization that makes large pretences of artistic dramatic experiment under the aegis of still another organization that elects to call itself by the impressive name, the American National Theatre and Academy. I am not so snobbish as to believe that interesting experiment and the box-office may not conceivably go hand in hand. But, as I have remarked earlier, I suffer a considerable skepticism about any organization like this one which has demonstrated pretty clearly that it is thinking of the box-office at the expense of sound and reputable dramatic exploration.

What interest there is in the presentation lies obliquely in contemplating the humor of Southern Negroes posturing a deep Russian introspection, grievously lamenting the effects of alcoholic indulgence, and otherwise comporting themselves, with imposed straight faces, like soul-tortured Slavs.

The performance was generally of the percussion sort often given by Negroes unrestrained by modulatory stage direction.

CHURCH STREET AND THE RESPECTFUL PROSTITUTE. FEBRUARY 9, 1948

A revival of the short play by Lennox Robinson and a new play by Jean-Paul Sartre, translated by Eva Wolas. Produced by New Stages, Inc., for the rest of the season's performances in, initially, the New Stages Theatre.

PROGRAM

CHURCH STREET

KATE RIORDAN	<i>Dorothy Patten</i>	SALLIE LONG	<i>Gertrude Corey</i>
HUGH RIORDAN	<i>Earl Hammond</i>	JIM DALY	<i>Lon Clark</i>
AUNT MOLL	<i>Charme Allen</i>	HONOR BEWLEY	<i>Barbara Joyce</i>
JACK RIORDAN	<i>Frank Butler</i>	JOSEPH RIORDAN	<i>Edgar Stehli</i>
MOLLY RIORDAN	<i>Shirley Eggleston</i>	EVOKED HUGH	<i>Eugene Paul</i>
MISS SARAH PETTIGREW		DR. SMITH	<i>Morton Lawrence</i>
	<i>Florida Freibus</i>	NURSE SMITH	<i>Sarah Cunningham</i>
MRS. LUCY LACY	<i>Ann Eliot</i>	CLERGYMAN	<i>William Brower</i>

SYNOPSIS: *The play takes place in the Riordans' living-room in a flat above the local bank in Knock, Ireland. Time: the present.*

THE RESPECTFUL PROSTITUTE

LIZZIE MCKAYE	<i>Meg Mundy</i>	JAMES	<i>Sid Walters</i>
THE NEGRO	<i>John Marriott</i>	SENATOR CLARKE	<i>Wendell Holmes</i>
FRED	<i>Karl Weber</i>	A MAN	<i>Martin Tarby</i>
JOHN	<i>Willard Swire</i>		

SYNOPSIS: *Scene 1. A room in a southern town; morning. Scene 2. The same; that evening.*

Directors: John O'Shaughnessy and Mary Hunter.

THE ROBINSON ITEM, performed here originally in 1934 by the Abbey Theatre company, is a sub-Pirandello exercise far beneath its author's competences as revealed in such of his interesting plays as *The White-Headed Boy*, etc. Its story is of a disconsolate playwright, returned to Ireland from London, who is persuaded that in the seemingly prosaic people in his early home lurk possibly esoteric and

available dramatic plots, and who sets himself to imagine them in a fantastic interlude wherein they act out their lives. In the end, he finds himself in doubt as to how much of his fancy may be real and how much false. All that the author has been able to derive from the idea is a repetitive and tenuous comedy, much of it destitute of any dramatic spirit. Some of its weaknesses were glossed over in the hands of the Abbey company, which included such impressive names as Barry Fitzgerald, Arthur Shields, F. J. McCormick, Denis O'Dea, Michael Dolan, P. J. Carolan, Maureen Delany and Eileen Crowe. But in the hands of the present troupe the frailties are only accentuated.

The Sartre fanatics had a time of it sustaining their enthusiasm for their hero in the face of *The Respectful Prostitute*. That they were able to put up the show they did is a credit to their loyalty, if not to their powers of critical inquiry. Having extolled him as the redeemer of the modern drama, they were slightly abashed by what, though they cautiously admitted it only by implication, was little more than another melodrama in which a Negro in the American South is falsely accused of the rape of a white woman and in which the customary pressure is brought to bear to prove his guilt in order to cover up a crime committed by a white man.

It is, of course, possible for a creditable dramatist to write a bad play; we have had sufficient instances of merit suddenly and for the nonce descended to mediocrity; but I doubt if any playwright so surpassingly worthy as Sartre has been touted by his disciples to be has produced one quite so impeachable as this. Quite aside from its other infirmities, it indicates in its supposedly super-cerebellar author an ignorance beyond the melodramatically superficial of subject matter and a speciousness of approach that turn it at times not into something merely approximating caricature but caricature outright. And without the veneer of the Existentialist philosophastry which previously has bedazzled the high-strung into imagining that there was much more to his plays than the less twittery

could manage to detect in them, it shows up both itself and its author in a sizzling light, as his idolators in France and England have reluctantly and with pain been embarrassed to admit, and as even his local votaries have had some visible agony in disbelieving. That, however, despite their momentary mild hesitations they will presently and with all the old fervor return to the tonic is not hard, if one reflects on past statistics in similar directions, to surmise. It took many years to disillusion the stanch believers in even the Cardiff giant and Henry George.

That Sartre's local constituency was partly deceived by Eva Wolas, his translator, is to be allowed. The precautionary lady has deleted from his original script a little of its imbecility, has here and there edited into it a measure of credibility that it was wholly without, and has lent it a small share of theatrical conviction. As Sartre wrote the play, it was often so ridiculously alien in its approach to its theme that even the French critics had no trouble in sniffing its absurdities and making sport of them. As it now stands, it is still a cut-and-dried lynch melodrama with a few effective theatrical moments but, while an improvement upon the original, nothing that any third-rate American playwright could not write, and indeed has.

In such reflections on Sartre's standing, I confine myself relevantly to his dramatic efforts; his novels are apart from the appraisal. It is these plays of his, so admired by his infatuates, that in the main present themselves to drama criticism as so many shoe-box bombs, their dollar alarm clocks ticking like mad and their wires of a startling probability, but minus any real explosives; all, however, prosperously scary to such as do not trouble to investigate them further.

When, on March 16, the company moved uptown into the Cort Theatre, Thornton Wilder's *The Happy Journey* was substituted for the Robinson play as a curtain-raiser. Written seventeen years ago — its original title was *The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden* — and since played by various amateur groups, it is a highly sentimentalized trifle about a family's trip in an old car to visit its

offspring in her married estate. Wilder employs the bare stage technique which was later to serve him in *Our Town*.

Meg Mundy's performance in the Sartre play indicated an uncommon talent in an actress of so little previous experience.

JOHN BULL'S OTHER ISLAND

FEBRUARY 10, 1948

A revival of the satirical political comedy by George Bernard Shaw. Produced by the Dublin Gate Theatre, sponsored by Richard Aldrich and Richard Myers in association with Brian Doherty, for 8 performances in the Mansfield Theatre.

PROGRAM

HODSON	Norman Barrs	NORAH REILLY	Meriel Moore
TOM BROADBENT	Hilton Edwards	CORNELIUS DOYLE	Denis Brennan
TIM HAFFIGAN	Reginald Jarman	FATHER DEMPSEY	Bryan Herbert
LARRY DOYLE		AUNT JUDY	Nora O'Mahony
	Michael Mac Liammoir	MATTHEW HAFFIGAN	Liam Gannon
FATHER KEEGAN	Edward Golden	BARNEY DORAN	Patrick Nolan
PATSY FARREL	Roy Irving		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The home and office of Doyle & Broadbent, Civil Engineers, Great George's Street, Westminster, London. A summer evening, 1904.* Scene 2. *A hillside near Roscullen, Ireland. An evening some days later.* Scene 3. *The Round Tower near Roscullen. Later that evening.* Act II. *Outside Cornelius Doyle's house, Roscullen. After breakfast the next morning.* Act III. Scene 1. *Parlor in Cornelius Doyle's house. The same day.* Scene 2. *The hillside. Later in the evening.*

Director: Hilton Edwards.

IN THE GRIND of nightly reviewing, often seemingly without end, you come willy-nilly to the point where merely relative values occasionally upset your critical poise and where, after plays for some time have been jumping on you and squashing you, you find yourself tickled to toss yourself into the air for one that conducts itself even a little more benignly. Such is the case, at least in a manner of speaking, with this *John Bull's Other Island* which, though very far from the best of Shaw, is still so markedly superior to most of the things we have been getting this season that under the circumstances it takes on the look of something right out of a first-class jeweler's window. That, for all its several deserts and one's comparative delight

in it, it is not out of any such window or even out of its author's second top drawer, is, of course, the more sober critical fact, which I here say the hell with. It is plenty cockle-warming as things go these nights and I, for one, am grateful to get it, particularly as it is acted by most of the visiting Irish players.

With any play as old as this, it is the habit of the reviewers to allow that everybody is probably already so familiar with it that there is no sense in repeating what it is about. The dodge is a convenient one, since it simultaneously not only flatters the wide dramatic knowledge of readers perhaps not more than one out of a thousand of whom knows anything at all about the play, but also frees the colleagues from telling at length the plot, which is one of the most irksome things about the reviewing business. While I appreciate that my particular clientèle is on the other hand on entirely intimate terms with dramatic literature from 438 B.C. to the present, it is still remotely possible that there may be one or even two amongst it whose notice the Shaw play has somehow escaped. So I report for their sakes that it deals humorously with the contrasting English and Irish temperaments and with the dreamy but nonetheless gimme Celts as opposed to the pseudo-realistic, matter-of-fact, and obtuse British.

Plot as plot has never much interested Shaw. He is, to be sure, sharp enough to realize that you have to have some kind of story, however slight, to get away with wit, however meritorious, at the box-office, and so has not neglected a thread of it. The thread is a visit to Ireland by a pair of codgers from England, one of whom is bent on uplifting a hypothetically martyred people about whom he understands nothing, the other, an anglicized Celt who views all reform and altruism as so much flumdiddle. The Irish begin by laughing at their quixotic saviour but in the end capily accept him at his own value for the material benefactions he promises to bestow on them. As is his custom, Shaw views the plot, or what there is of it, simply as a hook on which to hang his hat upside down and let his ideas spill out. The ideas in this instance may no longer

be as green as grass, but he sprinkles them into a semblance of that hue with the hose of his intellectual waggery and admirable literary style.

"It's all rot," remarks the English uplifter of a speech made by the English cynic. "It's all rot, but it's so brilliant, you know." Reviewing the play when it was first produced in London almost forty-four years ago, Walkley wrote, "Here, no doubt, Shaw is slyly taking a side glance at the usual English verdict on his own works. The verdict will need some slight modification in the case of *John Bull's Other Island*. For . . . the play is not *all* rot. Further, it has some other qualities than mere brilliancy. It is at once a delight and disappointment." To which, with some qualification of the word "rot," we may say, *stet*.

The presenting Gate company, as intimated, is in the aggregate a good one. I am well aware that there is often a tendency to overestimate alien actors when they offer themselves in another land in a play in which they portray characters indigenous to their own. But I trust I retain a composed enough eye to detect in this Irish aggregation the talent that is in some of its members.

In respect to the scanty physical production, Micheal MacLiammoir, co-founder with Hilton Edwards of the Gate and one of its present acting company, states, "The play, as I see it, remains not as a sidelight on the parliamentary passing show of 1904, but as a portrait, incomplete but penetrating and faithful, of two countries, two states of mind, two points of view about life. It is as dated as an old family photograph, as artless and as revealing. And that is perhaps why Edwards and I have thought it a good thing to paint its furniture (which nobody would think of sitting on any more but just of pointing at and remembering a little) on the backcloth." The explanation and apology are scarcely convincing. It would take a considerably more expert syllogism to make absorbent any such flagrant Irish skimping. Mr. MacLiammoir seems to have forgotten that if you paint furniture, "which nobody would think of sitting on any more," on a backdrop, it is a give-away to have nevertheless a few articles of it on

the stage, and to disclose the characters not only thinking of sitting on them but frequently depositing themselves on them.

My old friend, Ivor Brown, dramatic critic for the London *Observer*, has lately vented his indignation at the "little fuss-pots" who allow that some of Shaw's plays and opinions have dated, and Eric Bentley in his recent otherwise commendable book on Shaw has similarly permitted himself to look askance at those who have ventured that the great man "has had his day." Admiration and respect for Shaw, in which the twain surely do not stand alone, seem to have overcome their critical balance. That certain of Shaw's plays and opinions show their age must be evident to anyone this side of blind idolatry. This *John Bull's Other Island* is just one example. But to show age, whether in work or in person, is no great smirch, however much in the former direction it may be theatrically luckless. One does not speak of trash ageing, since it is already aged at birth. When one speaks of superior work having aged, it is a tribute to work that has been esteemed. Mr. Bentley in this connection also disturbs the judicious. In his general ardor for Shaw and speaking of his readings on him, he writes, "I found praise, but most of it naïve or invidious. I found blame, but most of it incoherent and scurrilous." May one doubt if Mr. Bentley's readings, though broad, have been quite broad enough? What he says is true so far as he has read and quotes, but surely there has been praise of Shaw, and a good deal of it from highly perceptive quarters, that has been in no degree either naïve or invidious, and blame from equally intelligent quarters in no degree incoherent and scurrilous. Mr. Bentley, of course, supports his contention with carefully chosen quotations. I believe that I, among a lot of others, might match him and even double him with others chosen with a like finesse.

Nor is he sometimes wholly exact. He speaks in his foreword of Edmund Wilson and myself as having written of Shaw as of a man who had had his day. So far, again true. But it was a very long and very brilliant day, and when a

writer crosses life's November one may scarcely expect of him that that day shall still be lit by the earlier dazzling sunshine. Criticism cannot be sentimental, nor can it confound fact with hope, unfortunately. Surely, if the reader will forgive him, there is no superior and condescending note, as Mr. Bentley seems to imply, in this from your present reviewer's last essay on Shaw:

"The great man is nearing the threshold of the hereafter. The theatre has not seen his like before and will not see it soon again. He has brought to it a merry courage, a glorious wit, a musical tenderness, and a world of needed vitality. He has laughed at the old gods and, to give them their due, the old gods have enjoyed it. And outside and beyond the theater he has let a wholesome breeze into more assorted kinds of national, international, private and public buncombe than has any other writer of his period. Therefore, hail, Shaw, hail and — I hope I shall wait long before saying it — farewell!"

DOCTOR SOCIAL. FEBRUARY 11, 1948

A play by Joseph L. Estry. Produced by Harold Barnard for 5 performances in the Booth Theatre.

PROGRAM

DR. NORMAN FARRAR	<i>Dean Jagger</i>	YVONNE TOMPKINS	<i>Mae Questel</i>
ANN HARRIS	<i>Eda Heinemann</i>	DR. ISAAC GORDON	<i>Al Shean</i>
DR. TOM MORRISSEY		LEE MANNING	<i>Haila Stoddard</i>
	<i>Ronald Alexander</i>	DR. FLEMING	<i>Donald Foster</i>
MRS. HAMILTON	<i>Nelly Malcolm</i>	PAUL HARRIS	<i>Drake Thorton</i>

SYNOPSIS: *The entire action of the play takes place in Dr. Farrar's office, laboratory and treatment room. Act I. The present. Act II. Scene 1. Three weeks later. Scene 2. One week later. Act III. Scene 1. Ten days later. Scene 2. One hour has passed.*

Director: *Don Appell.*

JOSEPH L. ESTRY is alleged to be a pen-name adopted by one Maxwell Maltz, a stage-struck New York plastic surgeon who doubtless will not be remembered as the author of the book of the musical show, *The Lady Says Yes*, which also will doubtless not be remembered, providentially. Mr. Maltz, a modest man, on the previous occasion cautiously and wisely resorted to the pen-name, Clayton Ashley. In that case as in this, as if sagely anticipating the worst, he has stoutly denied that either Estry or Ashley was or is himself, which is a matter that perhaps will not figure too importantly in history. If he is not Estry, I offer him my congratulations, since the play under present consideration, a scientific tiddledewink dealing with cancer research, is what the less refined are accustomed to describe as a smeller.

The hero of the little daisy is, like Mr. Maltz and consensually Mr. Estry, a plastic surgeon of fashionable cut whose particular genius lies in the reshaping of the unwelcome noses of his tony clientèle. To his office comes one day a beautiful young woman with a scar on her face,

which he diagnoses as a cancer. Aided by the customary elaborate program notes consisting of quotations from such great scientific journals as *Newsweek*, he experiments on the fair one with a spleen extract which *Newsweek* contends is a potential arrester of carcinoma and not only, surely to his own and probably to *Newsweek's* surprise and satisfaction, cures her but, to the surprise if not satisfaction of no one who has gone to the theatre more than a couple of times, falls in love with her. The scientific and amorous elements in the play are as dovetailed as a beer keg and baby go-cart; the writing enjoys all the flavor of a schoolboy's earliest attempts at belles-lettres; and the acting, except for a shrewd histrionic retirement from her role by Miss Stoddard, is minor summer-theatre. The only real professional note is to be found in Stewart Chaney's setting of the medical quarters.

When, in such cases, there is no thought, wit or literary sleight to compensate one in part for the chlorotic stage doings, it is as difficult to keep one's mind on the latter as it is to keep it on the repetitional calypso and umbilicus shows described in an earlier chapter, and one finds it scooting off in all kinds of directions. Purists in respect to drama criticism may blanch at the idea of recording such digressions, but since drama criticism would be wasted on any such exhibit as this and hence judicially is not entered into here, the recording may not be as entirely unwarranted as the precisians contend. While, in the latter's favor, I will not vouch for the digressions' quality, I accordingly submit them as examples of what a bad play and a bad playwright sometimes let me — and you — in for.

Here, then, are some of the things that, often irrelevantly, went through my head while it was optimistically expected to be occupying itself with the Estry revelations:

* * *

I am a fool not to have stayed at home on a night like this. The title, *Doctor Social*, should have been enough to warn me.

The critics have made so many jokes about stage butlers that playwrights now seem to be afraid to include one of them in their scripts. Instead, they resort, safely they think, to maids. I don't like it. A household that properly should have a butler, however waywardly comical the character may be, is unconvincing when his place is taken by a female servant who generally looks as if she had been out in the kitchen cooking lamb stew and had whipped on cap and apron to announce Sir Esme Paget-Mintz.

* * *

Many of our current playwrights feel that they have contrived something extra-commendable if they contain the action of their plays within a single day. Most often the time economy is transparently arbitrary and fraudulent. Drama in life on only the rarest occasions confines its course to twenty-four hours. Much more often it ploughs slowly over days, months, and years before reaching its resolution.

* * *

I have been accused of prejudice in my comprehensive distaste for and avoidance of the motion picture art which, its admirers sternly point out to me, has elements of beauty, intelligence, charm, sex-appeal, etc., which I am missing. All that I can say in reply, if they are right, is that Lillian Russell was similarly endorsed for her beauty, intelligence, charm, sex-appeal, etc., but that she was nevertheless not my type.

* * *

What often seems to impressionables to be symbolism in the plays of some contemporary playwrights is nothing but confusion of thought presented as deliberate intelligence.

* * *

If I were an actor, I should train myself to play the roles of Chinamen. I have yet to see an actor who failed in such a role; it seems to be one of the easiest and surest, whether

serious or comical, in the entire catalogue. True, I might not get many jobs, since plays and shows with Chinese roles, unlike those in the past, are few and far between. But when I did get one, I would know that I'd be certain to make a hit. If, on the other hand, I were an actress, I should look hard for roles in which I would be a Salvation Army girl, and for the same reason. You think the remarks are silly? Look up the records for the last seventy-five years.

* * *

I am frequently asked if I do not get bored going to the theatre night upon night after so many years. I notice that the questioner, who has trouble avoiding a trace of pity in his voice, is usually some man who has enthusiastically been going to a business office day after day for the same long length of time.

* * *

The line of dialogue in the Messrs. Lindsay's and Crouse's political play, *State Of The Union*, which was most admired by the critics and on which the authors were most highly complimented by them was, you may recall, "Let's stop thinking about the next election when we should be thinking about the next generation." On January 12, 1927, many years before, in a prayer offered by Glenn Frank, then president of the University of Wisconsin, at the fifty-eighth session of the State legislature, Dr. Frank said, "Save us from thinking about the next election when we should be thinking about the next generation."

* * *

I assuredly don't want to argue for a return of the old-time cloak and sword and kindred dramatic balderdash, but there was something impressively romantic about its titles which has passed from the titles of plays today and which latter bring a suggestion of drabness into a medium whose very foundation is romance. Think, for example, of *In The Palace Of The King*, *The Song Of The Sword*,

The Pride Of Jennico, The Count Of Monte Cristo, The Sprightly Romance Of Marsac, Sweet Nell Of Old Drury, When Knighthood Was In Flower, Captain Jinks Of The Horse Marines, Under Southern Skies, Alice Of Old Vincennes, The Helmet Of Navarre, D'Arcy Of The Guards, A Gentleman Of France, The Sword Of The King, My Lady Peggy Goes To Town, Hearts Courageous, The Proud Prince, John Ermine Of The Yellowstone, The Pretty Sister Of José, Sweet Kitty Bellairs, Dorothy Vernon Of Haddon Hall, and The Light That Lies In Woman's Eyes.

Think also of *If I Were King, The Dagger And The Cross, The Fortunes Of The King, The Prince Consort, A Parisian Romance, A Light From St. Agnes, A Blot In The 'Scutcheon, The Girl Of The Golden West, The Fascinating Mr. Vanderveldt, and The Daughter Of The Tumbrils.* And of *The Embassy Ball, The Prince Of India, King René's Daughter, The Rose Of The Rancho, The Belle Of London Town, The Rose Of The Alhambra, The Royal Box, When Knights Were Bold, The House Of A Thousand Candles, The Flower Of Yamato, The Royal Mounted, and The Prisoner Of Zenda.*

Think of all such purple dandies, and now think of what we have got on theatre marquees in later years: *Is Zat So?, Love 'Em And Leave 'Em, Lady, Behave!, Suds In Your Eye, Pick-up Girl, Oh, Brother!, Woman Bites Dog, Crazy With The Heat, Snookie, They Should Have Stood In Bed, Behind Red Lights, Bet Your Life, The Fireman's Flame, How To Get Tough About It, Waltz In Goosestep, and Battleship Gertie.* To say nothing of *Them's The Reporters, Stick-in-the-Mud, The Sap Runs High, Hot-Cha!, Move On, Sister, Are You Decent? Stripped, Everything's Jake, She Lived Next To The Firehouse, She Means Business, A Modern Virgin, A Regular Guy, and I Gotta Get out.*

No wonder.

* * *

The remarks of even the most illustrious workers in the theatre seem sometimes to be without much sense. Yeats,

for example, observes in *The Cutting Of An Agate*, "Of all artistic forms that have a large share of the world's attention, the worst is the play about modern educated people. It has one mortal ailment: it cannot become impassioned without making somebody gushing and sentimental. Educated people have no artistic and charming language except light persiflage, and no powerful language at all, and when they are deeply moved they look silently into the fireplace. . . ."

Is it possible that Yeats could not have been acquainted with a great variety of plays like Shaw's *Candida* among others, Granville Barker's *The Voysey Inheritance*, Schnitzler's *Professor Bernhardt* among others, O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*, Maugham's *Our Betters* and *The Circle*, some of the Pirandello plays, etc., etc.?

* * *

The never dying argument as to the relative beauty of the women of the theatre in the yesterdays and today overlooks, I think, one important point. Even assuming that both those of the past and the present have enjoyed the same measure of looks, there can be small doubt that those of other days seemed the more beautiful, and for a simple reason. They were, in brief, unlike most of those nowadays, presented beautifully by the men who produced the plays and shows in which they appeared. The good-looking girl in these times is simply thrown at an audience; in the past, she was insinuated into its appreciation. She was dressed with elaborate shrewdness; she was set into a lovely frame; she was lighted with canny care; she was press-agented with an eye to what is currently known in Hollywood as glamour; she was cautiously persuaded by her management to be seen only in the properly brilliant restaurants and with the properly important escorts; and she was photographed only by the Saronys and Hills and Alfred Cheney Johnstons who knew how to drape her figure and pose her in such wise that what attractiveness she possessed would be heightened by their cameras. She was, in

a word, even when beautiful on her own, lent an added beauty and an added allure.

The beautiful girl today gets no such treatment, or at best very little. She is photographed by some sidestreet bulb-squeezer who operates a theatrical mill and turns out photographs of all and sundry like so many doughnuts; she is an habituée of Sardi's and the steak houses, and generally in the company of Broadway nondescripts; she dresses in public not in the lovely evening things of her sisters of yesterday but as if she were on her way to market or a neighborhood movie; her press-agent publicizes her behind large hamburgers or with pictures showing her perched on a steamship rail with her skirt up to her navel and idiotically waving a hand in the air; and her management either casts her in unappetizing roles or pushes her out onto a stage dressed for the most part in an unattractive manner and lighted by someone whose real forte is the illumination of Broadway haberdashery windows.

* * *

It is a belief stubbornly held by the critics that actors can not achieve eminence in their profession save the plays in which they appear are authentic specimens of the dramatic art. Many actors and actresses have confounded the lofty principle. Duse achieved most of her great reputation in the rhetorical junk of D'Annunzio. Bernhardt achieved hers largely through such stuff as Sardou's and such things as *Camille* and *Frou-Frou*. All kinds of actors and actresses have built their reputations on rubbish: George Arliss with plays like *The Darling Of The Gods*, *The Rose*, *The Eyes Of The Heart*, etc.; Kyrle Bellew with *In His Power*, *Loyal Love*, *Raffles*, *The Thief*, and the like; Mrs. Fiske with a wealth of claptrap; Charles Hawtrey with everything from *The Private Secretary* and *The Lucky Miss Dean* to *A Message From Mars* and *The Cuckoo*; Rose Coghlan with *Forget-Me-Not*, *A Scrap Of Paper*, *The Silver King*, *Diplomacy*, etc.; Madge Kendal with such twaddle as *Broken Hearts*, *A Hero Of Romance*, *The Wicked*

World, etc.; and Sir Charles Wyndham with *David Garrick*, *Pink Dominoes*, *Dearer Than Life*, and *Betsy*.

And let the critics not forget E. S. Willard who spent his life largely in things like *A Pair Of Spectacles*, *A Fool's Paradise*, and *The Professor's Love Story*; the great Modjeska whose reputation was assisted quite as much by *Heartsease*, *The Old Love And The New* and *Adrienne Lecouvreur* as by her Ophelia and Juliet; and various such others. And what, today, of Helen Hayes? Let them think of most of the stuff in which that girl has appeared!

* * *

There is something comical to me in the spectacle of men wrapped up in scientific pursuits who, as in this play, always in their actor impersonations seem just to have come from Michael Arlen's tailor.

* * *

I certainly am a fool not to have stayed at home and worked on a possibly readable essay on all such cancer, syphilis, tuberculosis and like dramatic entertainments, at least as we have had them, with appropriate speculations on their place in a medium properly the province of poets, romancers, wits, visionaries, and star-stabbed imaginations.

GHOSTS. FEBRUARY 16, 1948

A revival of the play by Henrik Ibsen. Produced by the American Repertory Company and Louis J. Singer for one week's performances in the Cort Theatre.

PROGRAM

REGINA ENGSTRAND	Jean Hagen	MRS. HELENA ALVING
JACOB ENGSTRAND	Robert Emhardt	Eva Le Gallienne
REVEREND MR. MANDERS	Herbert Berghof	OSWALD ALVING
		Alfred Ryder

SYNOPSIS: The action takes place at Mrs. Alving's country house, beside one of the large fjords in western Norway. The time is toward the end of the nineteenth century. Act I. Late afternoon. Act II. After dinner; same evening. Act III. Dawn; the next morning.

Director: Margaret Webster.

LIKE TRUTH and pine needles, Eva Le Gallienne crushed to earth will rise again. Though her career has in greater measure been marked by frustration, her ardor is inexhaustible and year after year she persistently springs up to re-court the muse. The so-called American Repertory Company indicates a like resilience, perhaps because what little is left of it is largely this same determined lady. Though it already has failed twice, here at least in name it turns up once more. It would be extremely pleasant if I could report that the dual resurrection was a consummation to exalt the multitude, but I fear that that joy is denied me. And so yet again it becomes my unhappy duty to report that the occasion is scarcely restorative.

Of the firm opinion that Ibsen's plays call for some re-writing and re-editing and that she is the one to do it, Miss Le Gallienne, as in the case of *John Gabriel Borkman* last season, has volunteered her talents to *Ghosts*, with results that approach the bizarre. "When I visited Oslo in 1938," she says, "I was honored with a first edition of *Ghosts*. Thumbing the pages of the Norwegian script

[no language, apparently, is beyond Miss Le Gallienne's facile grasp] I was awed and amazed by the easy flowing dialogue that had vitality, spontaneity, wit and humor so sadly lacking in the translation of William Archer. . . . It is not, as classicists are apt to believe [may one ask what classicists?], stiff, ponderous, and replete with symbolism. In adapting Ibsen from the original Norwegian, I have brought it up to date. People speak in everyday speech, unadorned by pompous phrases of Victorian vintage."

That Archer's translation of the in its time remarkable play is at least in part what Miss Le Gallienne describes it as being (one doubts, among other things, its sad lack of vitality), is to be freely admitted. But that Miss Le Gallienne's version of the play, while grantedly a little more fluid to the contemporary ear, any more assists it is something less than an open question. To bring the speech of a drama of sixty-seven years ago—and one laid toward the end of the nineteenth century and concerned with problems and points of view peculiar to its immediate period—into a present day flavor is not only to make the play at times slightly fatuous but to emphasize to its damage its thematic age. When, in this later era of immediate diagnosis and penicillin and fever therapy, it is hoped to invest the once startling subject of syphilis with a current and equal startle by substituting for Archer's Victorian speech dialogue full of such terms and expressions as "let yourself go," "aren't I?" and "bitch"—when such is the fond indulgence, the subject matter, far from being made approximately modern, is made only to seem doubly dated. It avails little to name an old horse-car Buick.

I suppose, however, that, in view of what Miss Le Gallienne in the past has done to other of the classics, we should be grateful that she has not seen fit to perform even further upon the script. It seems to me that Ibsen remains a dramatist whom you either take as he was or leave strictly alone. But should Miss Le Gallienne in inevitably still another production of *Ghosts* increasingly think otherwise, I suggest that she go much farther than her present improvement upon him. Always one to be of help, I give

her a suggestion in brief outline. Why not change the scene to Connecticut, keep the orphanage from burning, and convert its barn-like structure into a summer theatre with Mrs. Alving as manager? Through his loving mother's influence, Oswald is given a place in its acting company, since she feels that the occupation will take his already tottering mind off itself. But, instead and to her woe, the orphanage-barn theatre acting and production drive the sensitive artistic soul of her poor son so crazy that he ends up, as the last curtain falls, crying for the *Sun* and its critic's notices on his performances.

The final tragic irony of it all is bound to exercise its spell over a New York audience, since it will appreciate that Mr. Morehouse is usually off shooting buffaloes in the summer season and does not review the rural playhouses.

Not merely a proficient but a superlative performance is necessary to provoke interest, apart from the historical and scholarly, in any present production of a play like *Ghosts*, and this one, except for the Oswald of Alfred Ryder, gets not even a faintly proficient one. Miss Le Gallienne's Mrs. Alving is much less acting in any real definition of the term than a recitation of the role. The recitation is a clear and intelligent one, and hints that she has a profitable career open to her as a platform reader of the classics; the women's clubs should welcome her like a sister. But what she presents on a dramatic stage is merely a lesson studiously learned and projected as a lesson. Of characterization there is nothing; and of acting nothing beyond a fist pounded into a palm to suggest determination, hands suddenly clasped to the sides of the head to register troubled concern, and a hand abruptly extended palm upward to indicate everything from solicitude to entreaty and from skepticism to resignation. When she is not speaking and has to sit aside whilst other characters are, she disappears from the stage completely; there is no sense of her presence; she seems to have done her little act and to be resting outside the play until again called upon. Her speaking voice is a good and agreeable one, but over-

all she gives, as heretofore, the impression of a dish of articulate ice-cream.

Robert Emhardt's Engstrand needs only a touch of Irish accent to fit handsomely into *John Bull's Other Island*. Herbert Berghof's Manders, both in makeup and stridor, belongs in a burlesque show version of *The Passing Of The Third Floor Back*. And Jean Hagen's Regina seems to have come out of the summer stock company which drove Oswald out of his mind. Add all this together, supplement it with Miss Le Gallienne's effort to dovetail the First Mrs. Fraser with the first Mrs. Alving, and adorn it further with invertebrate direction by Margaret Webster, and you begin to savor the picture.

On the general question of acting, and on Miss Le Gallienne's in particular, I should like to quote from a letter written to the *New York Times* by the Russian actor, Boris Marshalov:

Recent disputes about the Anglo-Saxon "restraint" and the European "over-acting" remind one of the anecdotal query: "Which is more correct — to say "ingnoramus" or "engnoramus?" When actors restrain the emptiness inside of them they are just as boring as the ones who throw at the audiences that same emptiness as so many colorful bubbles. Good acting is the ability to express oneself — simply, naturally, sincerely, convincingly, but also colorfully, interestingly and excitingly. It never is some of it; it is all of it. When one goes horseback riding, one is not satisfied with just the front of the horse or just the horse's derriere.

Critical and public dissatisfaction caused the withdrawal of the *Ghosts* production after a single week's engagement.

THE OLD LADY SAYS "NO!"

FEBRUARY 17, 1948

A fantasy by Denis Johnston. Produced by the Dublin Gate Theatre under the auspices of Richard Aldrich and Richard Myers in association with Brian Doherty for one week's performances in the Mansfield Theatre.

PROGRAM

THE SPEAKER

	<i>Micheal MacLiammoir</i>
SARAH CURRAN	<i>Meriel Moore</i>
MAJOR SIRR	<i>Reginald Jarman</i>
1ST REDCOAT	<i>Bryan Herbert</i>
2D REDCOAT	<i>Liam Gannon</i>

THE OTHER
ONES

Roy Irving
Edward Golden
Denis Brennan
Patrick Nolan
William Dalzell
Nora O'Mahony
Helena Hughes
Betsy Bogues
Patricia Kennedy
Edna O'Rourke

SYNOPSIS: *The action of this play takes place on the stage of a Dublin theatre; the time is the present. The opening scene represents the garden of "The Priory," the home of John Philpot Curran, close to Rathfarnham, Dublin, on the night of 25th August, 1803. The rest of the play takes place in the mind of The Speaker.*

Director: *Hilton Edwards.*

IT IS, I am told, sometimes bruited of me that I am prejudiced in favor of the Irish drama, which, all things considered, is like accusing me or anyone else of being prejudiced in favor of freshly cooked food as against left-overs pulled out of the icebox. Ireland, it seems to me, has for some years now been the only country whose playwrights in the aggregate, whether successfully or in failure, have indicated any real gesture toward dramatic imagination, dramatic-literary quality, and contempt for easy popularity. Some of their plays have been very bad (the recent *Kathleen* was just one horrible example); some have been fairly acceptable, or better; some have been grantedly among the masterpieces of our day and age. But whatever

they have been, they have with minor exception at least tried to swing over drama the lamp of poetry and beauty and to sprinkle it with a little of the dust of stars.

The man in the advertisements who sat down at the piano has not tempted any louder laughter than those of us who, for what seems a considerable time, have felt that way about things. And among the loudest cacklers have been the majority of our local producers and their subservient sheep. It is the humor of these that has kept from our stage all the new works of the matchless O'Casey and all the new imagery of a dreaming Dunsany and almost all the later efforts of their more accomplished countrymen, and for the greater part has blessed us instead with scrim backdrop fancy, tin-horn realism, and potential movie screen fare.

It has accordingly been a pleasure to have this Dublin company pay us a visit and afford us a glimpse for a change of some of its native writing. In the case of the play under consideration, by the author of the admirable *The Moon In The Yellow River*, it would be comfortably jolly for me if I could jump onto my little bandwagon and shout, "See, I told you so; here is another Irish masterpiece, written all of eighteen years ago, which the American stage has spurned!" But, such is the mean trick the theatre occasionally plays on me, I am afraid that I will not be able to do it. The play is no masterpiece. But it is nonetheless an exciting adventure in the theatre; it is far and away the most imaginative play seen here in some time; it touches the hem of radiance and wonder; and over-all it brings to a stage worn and tired and feeble a renewed life and a renewed challenge. And it does not stand the ghost of a chance to make a nickel in this theatre of ours as that theatre presently stands.

The story, in the first place, which deals with an actor who suffers an injury to his head while playing the role of the idealistic patriot, Robert Emmet, and who in his delirium moves despairingly through the chaos and corruption of the modern Irish spirit, is confusing to the local mind. It moreover in the telling at moments confuses it-

self, and now and then is repetitious. It is also a bit too long, and it descends here and there from its purple heights into the gully of relatively damp expression. But all the same and with all its slips it remains a proud and brilliant effort, and it was to be recommended to those few remaining theatregoers amongst us who still view the stage as Shaw viewed it and its critics. "But there really was something to roar at this time," he wrote. "There was a real play . . . and for me, at least, there was a confirmation of my sometimes flagging faith that a dramatic critic is really the servant of a high art, and not a mere advertiser of entertainments of questionable respectability of motive."

What Johnston has set himself to do is to evolve a dramatic pattern based on the principles of musical composition. Though his attempt goes sometimes awry, the technical plan comes through save for an incorporated scherzo, treating of the dilettante element in present day Dublin, which has the effect of violating the preceding and subsequent movements. What he has further set himself to capture in the direction of technique is, to quote his spokesman, the mixing of all the elements in his story in a nightmare's cauldron. "The Old Lady who says 'No!' becomes a caustic vision of modern Ireland, a degraded Kathleen ni Houhlihan, and is confused in the mind of Emmet, her lover, with Sarah Curran (his sweetheart) and with Beatrice whose image haunted Dante in his journey through the infernal regions; with the fulfillment of his own soul; and with the discovery of the secrets of life and death." The characters, we are reminded, are not so much individuals as general types, symbols of ideas or attitudes. And the dramaturgical plan lies somewhere between a kind of Greek choral tragedy and a modern farcical satire. The undertones are those of Joyce and Freud, the overtones those of O'Casey and Yeats. The result is now and again a little perplexing; so much is piled upon so much; but the final impression is of a play in which the sun strikes through the clouds much more often than the clouds obscure it.

The direction meets ably the difficulties imposed upon it; the choral business is handled with an uncommon proficiency; and the acting company is at its best. The scenic backgrounds, however, are at cheap fault.

Only a small portion of the local critical reaction to the play was favorable. In larger degree, the verdicts were expressed in such terms as "doggedly chaotic and often very dull," "pretty cumbersome and steadily untheatrical," "gives you the willies," "a dismal center of disappointment," "tedious and exasperating," and "it is as difficult to sit through as it is to read through Joyce's *Ulysses*. Both are confusion rampant. Both send you to commentators who think they know what the shooting is all about and are not backward in explaining it to you. You can have our share of both." As to the confusion in understanding the play, I like Mr. Kronenberger's "As for understanding every bit of it, it is far less of a misfortune not to know what a play is all about than to know what it is all about within the first four minutes."

What our theatre seems to want, in brief, is not any such valorous drama, any such attempt to reach up into the boughs of imagination and poetry, but rather merely good, loud, rough laugh shows like *Mister Roberts*, whereon I quote from the tributes of the same reviewers quoted above: "A magnificent drama," "a moving drama that no one who witnesses it will soon forget," "everything which is wonderful about the theatre," "a salty and grand play," "a play that held me on my chair's edge, laughing outrageously with tears behind the laughter," "among the finest," and "a triumphant example of drama."

Page Mr. Shaw.

MISTER ROBERTS. FEBRUARY 18, 1948

A play by Thomas Heggen and Joshua Logan based on the novel of the same title by Heggen. Produced by Leland Hayward for the rest of the season's performances in the Alvin Theatre.

PROGRAM

CHIEF JOHNSON	<i>Rusty Lane</i>	REBER	<i>John Campbell</i>
LIEUTENANT (JG) ROBERTS		ENSIGN PULVER	<i>David Wayne</i>
	<i>Henry Fonda</i>	DOLAN	<i>Casey Walters</i>
DOC	<i>Robert Keith</i>	GERHART	<i>Fred Barton</i>
DOWDY	<i>Joe Marr</i>	PAYNE	<i>James Sherwood</i>
THE CAPTAIN	<i>William Harrigan</i>	LIEUT. ANN GIRARD	<i>Jocelyn Brando</i>
INSIGNA	<i>Harvey Lambeck</i>	SHORE PATROLMAN	<i>John Jordan</i>
MANNION	<i>Ralph Meeker</i>	MILITARY POLICEMAN	
LINDSTROM	<i>Karl Lukas</i>		<i>Marshall Jamison</i>
STEFANOWSKI	<i>Steven Hill</i>	SHORE PATROL OFFICER	
WILEY	<i>Robert Baines</i>		<i>Murray Hamilton</i>
SCHLEMMER	<i>Lee Krieger</i>		

SYNOPSIS: Scene: Aboard the U. S. Navy Cargo Ship, AK 601, operating in the back areas of the Pacific. Time: A few weeks before V-E Day until a few weeks before V-J Day.

Director: Joshua Logan.

WHILE ON THE ROAD previous to its New York appearance, the play was heralded in terms only slightly less hysterical than those which half a dozen years before had touted the approach of the Ringling Brothers' Gargantua. Unlike Gargantua, who turned out to be no invigorating man-eater but a monkey so docile that he had to be fed quarts of vodka to induce him to make even moderately ferocious faces at the customers, it is found to be a sound attraction. It is, true, contrary to what we had been led to believe was an exalted specimen of *ars dramatica*, worthy of the ecstasies of the higher criticism, scarcely anything in that line. But, purely as a theatrical show and nothing else, it is bawdily amusing stuff, admirably directed by Joshua Logan, excellently acted by a cast headed by Henry

Fonda, David Wayne, Robert Keith and William Harrigan, and aptly designed by Jo Mielziner.

Laid on a Navy cargo ship operating during the late war in the back areas of the Pacific far from the scenes of battle, it portrays the effect of the long and deadly monotony on the members of the crew and centers on the desperate efforts of one of the ship's officers to get away and into action, with the troubles he encounters both with the captain and his shipmates who misunderstand his motives. The language is tough, the humor Restoration-plus, and the resulting hilarity loud. So much for that. When, however, it comes to analyzing the proceedings, which is about as gratuitous as analyzing a burlesque show or a pretty and amusing girl, the findings are not entirely so congenial. My personal acquaintance with life in the Navy is scarcely profound and has been confined largely to a single experience in my youth with Navy Plug Cut, which I may say was not conducive to inspiring in me any overwhelming desire to become a part of it. But, while I accordingly am happy to leave the intimacies of the subject to those who know more about them, I can not resist the impression that the play itself is often very much like *A Young Man's Fancy*, or any other such boys' camp or school play, gone to sea. It consists, in short, mostly in a succession of more or less familiar schoolboy pranks, or free adaptations thereof, performed by men with bare chests dripping glycerine sweat and to the accompaniment of the language commonly identified with sailors, and interrupted periodically by the equally familiar plot of the boy (in this case a naval lieutenant junior grade) whom the other boys suspect of something or other but who eventually proves himself to be as good as gold. All that is missing from the fundamental picture are the school pennants, together with the inevitable "Visit Atlantic City" one, on the cabin walls and the off-stage baseball or football game.

Present, for example, are the episodes in which the boys peer through binoculars at a distant window which reveals a girl taking a shower-bath, in which they concoct an

alcoholic tipple out of daffy ingredients, in which they plan to place a large firecracker under the head-master's (the captain's) bed, and in which they muss up his pet palm plant. Also the ones in which they prepare for the advent of a female by dolling up the room (the ship's cabin) with sofa pillows bearing saucy legends, in which they return from a party with clothes disarranged and still obviously under the influence of drink, in which they discuss their amorous relations, or their hopes for them, with the girls, and in which one of the boys after a fight shows up with a black eye and minus his apparel. Also, as well, the ones in which the boys, who have been loafing, pretend upon the captain's sudden appearance to be deeply engrossed in their work, in which they pull out from under the covers on their beds various forbidden, secreted articles, in which they outwit the police officer who comes to make trouble for them, etc.

In another direction, the show provides the standard scenes in which the boy wrongly thought by the others to be guilty of something manfully sticks to the word of honor he has given another and remains silent in the face of the accusations; in which his loyal friend who is privy to the facts sets his lips tightly in his temporary inability to help him out of his predicament; in which his friends, at last understanding, gather sentimentally to bid him farewell and present him with a small token of their affection which they have fashioned out of their meagre resources; and the later reading of a letter which brings the sad news that their hero has been killed in action. The language throughout, as already intimated, embraces a constant employment of such terms as "bastard" and "son-of-a-bitch," which are doubtless authentic enough, and the general dialogue flavor is reflected in some such line as that describing the captain's award of a small palm tree "for delivering more toothpaste and toilet paper than any other Navy cargo ship in the safe area of the Pacific," along with the one properly to be anticipated in any exhibit dealing with sailors, "There's only one thing you ever thought about for a half hour in your life."

Nevertheless, if you are not given to such objectionable prying, the whole, to repeat, constitutes a lively and entertaining show, with enough sex added to it to persuade an audience that it is not essentially a schoolboy play at all, but a realistic picture of life aboard a ship in the United States Navy. And, unlike *The Old Lady Says "No!"*, it will unquestionably make a fortune.

TONIGHT AT 8:30. FEBRUARY 20, 1948

A revival of a series of six short plays by Noel Coward. Produced by Homer Curran, Russell Lewis and Howard Young for 26 performances in the National Theatre.

CAST

Gertrude Lawrence, Graham Payn, Philip Tonge, Norah Howard, Valerie Cossart, Sarah Burton, Rhoderick Walker, William Roerick, and Booth Colman.

Director: Noel Coward.

MR. COWARD'S SUCCESS in the light-minded theatre is largely predicated on three diligently rehearsed and even more diligently executed capers. The first is a fancily superior contempt for the standard morality made acceptable to the laity by airing it through characters who bear only the faintest resemblance to normal human beings and whose dicta are therefore as amusedly tolerated as are those, say, of politicians on ethics. The second is the trick of passing off a calculated impertinence for wit by lodging it in the mouths of glossily dressed characters and directing it to be spoken in fastidious accents through elevated noses. The third is an abstinence from any possible intelligence and an evasion of the dramatic consequences by whimsically deprecating what remote symptoms of it the characters may seem to ventilate.

That Mr. Coward is a shrewd and clever artisan is obvious; and I am no more reflecting on his shrewdness and cleverness than I would presume to reflect on the same attributes in a watch repairer who triumphantly persuades one that the main-spring is broken, convincingly holds the watch for three weeks, and then puts a couple of drops of oil into the works and charges one ten dollars. Such things require a virtuosity, of sorts, and when it comes to getting away with the few drops of oil Mr. Coward is one of the very best in the business. But to regard him at all seriously

as a dramatist is, I suspect, a pleasure reserved to oil-drop criticism. Whenever he has defiantly ventured beyond the minor cocktail and cigarette drama and beyond the chichi and frou-frou aspects of character, he has found himself still up to his neck in the old adhesive marshmallow icing. For his tricks are alien to an interpretation of life in any of its more important phases and what he has to bring to the job is merely the familiar silk hat with a false bottom, but minus any rabbit.

In his own little field, however, he has had fairer worldly fortune and he has amply deserved it, considering the delight he has given in his role of clown performing for audiences of crippled children. That that performance is a professional one is scarcely to be doubted. Since those audiences in considerable degree are composed of people given to the aggressively fashionable life, he is experienced enough in that quarter to realize, for example, that, despite the cynical view of those who are no part of it, what is referred to as the set's small talk at least makes a little sense, whereas its efforts at talk of even slightly greater bulk make none whatever. And it is such small talk that he accordingly and not without sagacity implants in his dipsydoodle characters.

His acquaintance with humanity, though apparently gained at some distance, has also imbued him with other equally heady concepts which he has embroidered into prosperous theatrical fare. Having concluded, for instance, that love as demonstrated by most of its victims consists only in a coincidental inflammation of dormant sentiment and a suspension of active intelligence, he leaves any further investigation of it to his playwriting colleagues and engages himself aloofly to treat of it as of a piece with nibbling a contaminated violet. Having also deduced that men go to the theatre to forget and women to remember, he profitably flatters both with the deception of female characters who contrarily forget and males who remember.

Nor does his immense ingenuity stop there. Privy to the fact that little is more discommodious to the patience of

the type of audience he attracts than lengthy dialogue speeches possessed of some literary distinction, he gives his characters the kind of monosyllabic utterance favored by inarticulate foreigners attempting English for the first time. The result is such discourse as "How d'you feel?" "Frightful." "So do I." "Good!" which, while it may impress others as indicative of the intercourse of half-wits, is revelled in as the height of smartness by his swank, verbally bankrupt admirers. He further appreciates that, with his special clientèle, it is risky to go too far in meritorious epigrammatic expression and that it is better to keep it on an amateur and easily digestible level. The result in turn is such eligible scintillations as "Being married to eminence requires a little forbearance, especially if the eminence is dear to you"; "Pangs of conscience are tiresome; they're also exceedingly bad for you"; and "The dead at least have the sense to be quiet."

There is also the matter of what our French friends call *ton*. Mr. Coward, when it comes to *ton*, is as high-toned as a calliope. Not high-toned, that is, in the manner of a Sheridan, Wilde, Pinero or any other such dandy, but rather in that of a boutonnière on a pajama top. His plays beam with "members of the Country Club," Samolan boys in silver earrings and bracelets serving trays of drinks, "insufferable cads," allusions to exclusive restaurants, "lovely creatures exquisitely dressed and with great charm of manner," gaudy butlers and valets, catalogues of the more recherché ocean liners and dukes, "gloomy dinners at the Embassy," and characters who collapse wearily on sofas. And in the promotion of the tone, the dialogue is enriched with endlessly ejaculated "too utterly," "too fantastics," "terribly drearys," "frightfully embarrassings," and "how terrifyings."

While such Fauntleroy adventures in Wildeana may rank with criticism not materially above the average musical show book, they nevertheless, as has been recorded, rank high in the estimation of the kind of audiences who regard a strict mental and literary diet as vital to the

health of comedy and who view as an affront to polite post-dinner theatregoeing anything of more depth than a finger-bowl. Mr. Coward well knows the people he has to sell and gives them the finger-bowls they want, now with a rose petal, now with a slice of lemon, and then again merely neat. But it always remains the same finger-bowl, filled with tepid water.

Sometimes, while the vessel is being served, he supplies a little music, which no end tickles his guests' vanity in their clever recognition of it as warmed-over Grieg, Puccini or Lehár. Sometimes, there is the fillip of a little saucy conversation, usually of an eccentric sexual nature, made comfortable to the select company by couching it in serio-travesty speech. And sometimes, by way of cajoling his guests into imagining that the finger-bowl is the Thames, with Maugham punting on it, he goes to the length of describing his characters partly for the human caricatures they are. But in the end what it all amounts to is still only the small receptacle for fingertip dipping in the midst of such snazzy chitchat as "Prince and Princess Jean Marie de Larichon have left the Hotel George Cinq en route for the Riviera."

The revived short plays, both light and serious, are *Ways And Means*, *Family Album*, *Red Peppers*, *Shadow Play*, *Fumed Oak*, and *Hands Across The Sea*. Their essential nature may be limned in a few strokes:

Ways And Means. "The scene is a bedroom in the Lloyd-Ransomes' home, Villa Zephyre, on the Cote d'Azur." Dialogue sample:

Stella: Here's a letter from Aunt Hester.

Toby: Is she well and hearty?

Stella: Apparently.

Toby: To hell with her.

Family Album. "The music plays softly; an under-current to grief." Dialogue sample:

Emily: It has stopped raining.

Richard: Not quite, Emily, but it is certainly clearing.

Lavinia: It was fitting that it rained today. It has been a sad day and rain became it.

Jasper: True, very true.

Jane: A little sunshine would have been much pleasanter nevertheless.

Red Peppers. Samples of the vaudeville characters' dialogue:

George: What's the matter with my singing?

Lily: What *isn't* the matter with it!

George: Don't you think I could ever do anything with my voice?

Lily: Well, it might be useful in case of fire.

* *

Bert: What's wrong with my orchestra?

Lily: Nothing, apart from the instruments and the men what play 'em.

Shadow Play. Consult foregoing general description of its author.

Fumed Oak. Theme: *Vide* W. S. Maugham's *The Breadwinner*. Dialogue samples:

Doris: Pity you don't go and live with Nora for a change.

Mrs. Rockett: Nora hasn't got a spare room.

Doris: Phyllis has, a lovely one, looking out over the railway. I'm sure her hot-water pipes wouldn't annoy you, there isn't hot water in them.

* *

Henry: Stop ordering me about. What right have you got to nag at me and boss me? I'm the one that pays the rent and works for you and keeps you.

Hands Across The Sea. "The scene is the drawing-room of the Gilpins' flat in London." Samples of dialogue:

Piggie: Marvellous. You're an angel, Ally — I must take off these clothes, I'm going mad —."

Walters: Her ladyship is changing. I'll tell her you are here.

Mrs. Wadhurst: Thank you.

Mr. Wadhurst: Thank you very much.

* *

Bogey: Cocktail?

Clare: Thank God!

* *

Piggie: You'd better come and dine tonight — I'm on a diet, so there's only spinach, but we can talk —

And in over-all Joycean stream:

"Beastly . . . so charming it's positively nauseating . . . The Fenwicks will be arriving to play golf in a minute . . . There isn't always music, and moonlight . . . You rang, madame? Make a cocktail, will you, Ernest, a dry Martini. Very good, madame . . . Bring some fresh cocktails, Ernest. Yes, madame . . . Oh, it was all horrid; he was much older than me; very rich, fortunately; we went to Italy, Como first and then Venice, it was lovely . . . But charm, that's what counts, darling . . . Have you finished with the cocktail things, madame? . . . You're so foolish up on your romantic high horse — how often have you ridden it wildly until it went lame and you had to walk home . . . That's what made the sadness in your eyes . . . Have you had many lovers? . . . You've been married twelve years. How naïve you are. . . . There's a little brooch between us, a little brooch with emeralds and sapphires that someone gave to Leonora years ago . . . Love is a very comprehensive term, my sweet . . . How does it feel to be so desirable, to be wanted so much? . . . The Rawlingsons, who the hell are they? . . . Frightfully, my sweet, frightfully . . . Why don't you have them down for the weekend? Don't be so idiotic. They probably wouldn't have the right clothes . . . Let's have a drink. Cocktail? No, a long one, whisky and soda . . . I recognize her from the *Tatler*; she was Lady Hurstley, you know, then she was Lady MacFadden . . . I do hope Lady Dalborough will be here . . . She's the niece of the

Duke of Frensham, her mother was Lady Merritt . . . Mix a cocktail, Bogey, I'm a stretcher case . . . Give me another cocktail, Piggie, I want to get so drunk that I just can't hear any more . . . Are you going to Nina's Indian ding-dong? . . . So tiresome, so terribly, hideously tiresome, my sweet . . . Are you happy with that cocktail or would you rather have tea? . . . I adored Wally, he was a darling . . . Give me a cocktail, I haven't had one at all yet and I'm exhausted . . . Oh, my God, that was the most awful half an hour I've ever spent . . . Come on, Ally, I've got to dress . . . You know perfectly well I hate Freda's guts . . . Oh, goodbye, it's been absolutely lovely . . . It isn't the money, it's the lack of consideration, my sweet . . . I knew marrying you was a mistake at least seven years ago but I never realized the thoroughness of the mistake until now . . . You will be interested to hear that Mrs. S. J. Pendleton gave a small dinner party for Mr. and Mrs. Hubert Weir at the Hotel Normandie in Le Touquet last night . . . Elena's splashed herself from head to foot with the last precious drops of my scent this morning . . . Among the guests were Lord and Lady Haven, the Countess Pantulucci . . . How thrilling! . . . Something really humiliating, like being sick at a Court Ball . . . It's insufferable. . . . Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Alford have returned from Vichy and are staying at the Crillon, they are to be joined in a few days by Mrs. Alford's sister, Lady Croker . . . A little Madeira, Emily? . . . Mr. and Mrs. Toby Cartwright have left the Villa Zephyre under a cloud . . . Bon jour, Gaston . . . My merriment is entirely a social gesture . . . Backgammon, seven thousand francs . . . It's the most awful bore, my sweet . . . I loved Dimitri dreadfully; do you mind if I take a little of your scent? . . . We're going up to Venice to lunch . . . Don't be silly, darling, we've overstayed frightfully but we were having such a lovely time . . . The car will be waiting for you at twelve-thirty . . . I do feel so horrid about it . . . Go into Cannes this afternoon and pop them . . . It's madness, stark, staring madness . . . Is there no justice in the universe? Absolutely none, dear, I remember remarking that to Nanny only the other day when the stopper came out of

my nail varnish . . . She appears to have been a mean old bitch . . . It seems a pity that you can't turn your devastating wit to a more commercial advantage; you should write a gossip column . . . She sleeps alone, you know; Irving is separated from her by the bathroom; it would be deliciously easy . . . My poor sweet! . . . Get into bed, darling — If you're beastly to me, I'll yell the place down . . . Stella, be quiet, your behavior is in the worst possible taste . . . Have you gone mad? . . . Touché, Jasper . . . As you say, Lavvy, but my throat is cruelly dry . . . You shock me appallingly, Emily, I'm almost sure you do . . . It was a waltz, of course it was, don't you recall it, my dear, we danced to it years later, at a ball . . . You rang, Mr. Jasper? . . . The Duc and Duchesse de Fauchois are at the Meurice with . . ."

The felicitous Miss Lawrence, as heretofore, shone in the leading feminine roles of the plays and was supported by an in the main competent company. It was the general critical opinion, however, that Graham Payn was not suited to the parts played originally by Mr. Coward. It is my personal opinion that the general critical opinion was correct. Mr. Payn, though a very commendable performer, enjoys an unmistakable masculinity that scarcely harmonizes with the falsetto tone of the Coward characters.

The speedy failure of the enterprise possibly pointed to the unthinkable thought that Mr. Coward's long hold on his admirers may be waning, or, even more unthinkably, that his admirers have grown up a bit.

WHERE STARS WALK. FEBRUARY 24, 1948

A fantasy by Micheal MacLiammoir. Produced by the Dublin Gate Theatre company under the auspices of Richard Aldrich and Richard Myers in association with Brian Doherty for 2 week's performances in the Mansfield Theatre.

PROGRAM

SOPHIA SHERIDAN	<i>Meriel Moore</i>	SHEILA McCANN	<i>Patricia Kennedy</i>
ROBERT TWOMEY	<i>Denis Brennan</i>	MRS. DEMPSEY	<i>Nora O'Mahony</i>
REX DILLON	<i>Roy Irving</i>	EILEEN	<i>Helena Hughes</i>
TOMMY MILLINGTON		MARTIN	<i>Micheal MacLiammoir</i>
	<i>Edward Golden</i>	NIGEL BRUNTON	<i>Norman Barrs</i>

SYNOPSIS: *The action of the play takes place in Sophia Sheridan's house in Dublin at the present day. Act I. A night in April. Act II. The next morning. Act III. The last night in April.*

Director: *Hilton Edwards.*

IT SEEMS TO ME that what playgoers denounce as destructive criticism is sometimes confined very much less to the incriminated critics than to the playgoers themselves. The critics' destructiveness has as its object such plays, producers and performers as are inimical to the health and progress of the theatre. Its purpose is to prevent the spread of plague by isolating the infected. The destructive criticism at times demonstrated by the playgoers, and which consists in resolutely remaining away from plays and productions of merit, on the other hand contributes to the theatre's decline and opens it up to further mediocrity, thus only making the critics do double duty in their efforts to curtail the pox.

The local failure of the worthy Dublin Gate company, of its worthy aims and of two of its worthy presentations is accordingly to be laid not so much to any destructive opinion they suffered from the in this case lapsed merchants of criticism as to the playgoers who, for all their censure of them, seem nevertheless docilely to follow them,

and who by their absence helped to bring misfortune to the visitors' earlier ventures.

When it comes to this third and last offering, however, neither the critics nor the playgoers were to blame, at least in the destructive quarter described. Most of the former were rather to be blamed for seeming to discern excellences in it that were not visible to any other eye, and most of the latter were to be complimented on not following them, for a change. Though Mr. MacLiammoir's play tries hard to achieve the strange beauty implicit in much of the drama of his countrymen, it achieves instead only something that, in view of its occasional similarity to the Carroll play, might well have been called *Shadow Without Substance*. It mistakes a round candy box for the moon, and its flights of imagination too often are grounded by engine trouble. The acting and direction, moreover, were on this occasion so consistently stock that the playwright's weaknesses were unassisted by anything in the way of crutches. And, incidentally, one more play about the old Irish gods and goddesses and kings, unless it be written by a dramatist of real gifts, will find me, in case anyone is looking for me, in the nearest bar.

Mr. MacLiammoir has taken for his theme the verse by Yeats:

..... how a Princess Edain,
A daughter of a King of Ireland, heard
A voice singing on a May eve like this,
And followed, half awake and half asleep,
Until she came to the land of Faery,
Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue.
And she is still there, busied with a dance
Deep in the dewy shadow of a wood
Or where stars walk upon a mountain top.

With this as the key, he brings into the house of an actress in Dublin in the present day two servants who are the reincarnations of the Edain and Midhir of Irish legend,

the one the daughter of an old king, the other her transcendental wooer in the old misty line. The actress at the moment is rehearsing a play in which the twain figure and is given to operating a planchette board to communicate with their spirits. The two figures renew their courtship between their menial duties, make their mystical presence felt by her to the larger comprehension and advantage of the dramatic role she is to play, and eventually take their departure from the earthly scene in the shape of swans.

That there is a fanciful play of sorts in the materials is evident even from the crude outline, but Mr. MacLiammoir has failed to extract it. He has difficulty in dovetailing the fanciful and the real; his fanciful is largely a matter of two players affecting set, far-away looks on their faces, reading their lines in that manufactured tremolo which passes for a whimsical beyond-world quality, and moving about with a wistful hesitation opposite to their sprightly gait in the mundane scenes — and all to an obligato of suddenly dimmed lights, a stage colored by off-stage lavender gelatine slides, and hidden music. And his contrasting real is merely poor drawing-room comedy, replete with the customary whiskey decanters, telephone calls, derisive remarks on the English, and observations on the virginity or lack thereof in the female guests. There are moments when his imagination seems about to triumph over the stereotypes, but they are evanescent, and the end impression is of two plays, neither satisfactory, which have been joined together by a crooked tunnel through which for the most part funnels only a damp, precocious, poetastrical wind.

That the aim here once again is elevated and that the play in intention once again shames the deliberate commercialism of so many of our American writers for the theatre is clear enough. But that it does not come off is equally clear, which to a more sensitive critic than myself might in view of his earlier high remarks on the Irish drama be a bit mortifying. In such junctures, a critic of that species would have but one self-protective course open to him, to wit, the recourse to a trick well-known to sales-

men of the critical art, which is the substantiation, in the face of uncomfortable contrary evidence, of a previous long and stoutly held opinion by the shrewd manipulation of sophistry into at least a momentary semblance of logic. That the resort to any such artifice is lamentable is naturally not to be argued, yet it has been employed by some of the otherwise best and most honorable critics the world has known, and it has been surprisingly successful in fooling all save the few more alert minds among their readers, whose only retaliation has been the dispatching of disgusted messages to the offenders which the latter, it need not be said, have carefully kept from outside knowledge and which hence have not embarrassed their standing in the slightest. I am, of course, so upright that I would not deign to stoop to any such speciosity, but if I were not I should probably proceed as follows:

What seems to be the faulty dovetailing of the two elements in Mr. MacLiammoir's play may, after all, be not so faulty as appears to the casual critic, since the elements in point may be regarded as separate movements, as in a musical composition, and so be dramaturgically condoned. This, of course, is bosh, but it has a fairly plausible sound.

Secondly, I should contend that, though the play deals again with the Irish legendary gods, goddesses, kings and princesses and deals with them in scarcely satisfactory dramatic-literary terms, the author at least brings a novel touch of humor to the business and thus makes the old stuff, despite its poor treatment, a little more palatable. While this also may have a moderately convincing ring, it is essentially bogus, since the humor, though present, is not any more satisfactory than the dramatic-literary terms.

Thirdly, it would be easy to argue that, whatever the defects of such a play, it possesses the charm common to so much of Irish drama. But just how a play so lacking in general quality can have charm of any kind, I would be careful not to explain.

Fourthly, I should pretend that the drawing-room element in the play by its very routine nature tends to

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heighten the fanciful, romantic element, and that the routine nature was possibly deliberate on the part of the playwright, which, obviously, is nonsense for all its superficial reasonableness.

Fifthly —

But I daresay you get the idea.

 HEDDA GABLER. FEBRUARY 24, 1948

A revival of the play by Henrik Ibsen. Produced by Louis J. Singer and the American Repertory Company for 2 weeks' performances in the Cort Theatre.

PROGRAM

MISS JULIANA TESMAN	MRS. ELVSTED	<i>Emily McNair</i>
Marion G. Evensen	JUDGE BRACK	<i>Herbert Berghof</i>
BERTA	EILERT LOVBORG	
Merle Maddern		
GEORGE TESMAN		<i>Efrem Zimbalist, Jr.</i>
Robert Emhardt		
HEDDA TESMAN	Eva Le Gallienne	

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *Drawing-room of Tesman's villa, in the west end of Christiana. Morning.* Act II. Scene 1. *The same. Afternoon.* Scene 2. *The same. The following morning.* Act III. *The same. Evening.*

Time: *Early 1890's.*

Director: *Eva Le Gallienne.*

AS AGAIN in the case of the ice skating shows, one review of Miss Le Gallienne is perforce much like another. The monotony of the former is matched by the monotony of the lady's long, ambitious and manly but unsuccessful efforts to establish herself as an acceptable actress. That she is a completely sincere, hard-working, and extra-theatrically intelligent person is obvious. That she further has conducted her career on no low level but has sought to do the higher things in drama is similarly obvious. And that she has, unmistakably, been motivated by a commendable desire to assist the theatre in every way within her small means is not less so. But, and I believe that most of my colleagues at last agree, her limitations as an actress are so serious and her intelligence is so generally at theatrical fault that her labors unfortunately seem bound to come to little.

When I speak of Miss Le Gallienne as an actress, I use the term only with the greatest liberality. What she is, as I have often remarked before, is rather merely an expert

reciter of the roles in which she casts herself, with acting in any strict definition no part of her performances. She reads her lines well, but she does not dramatize them in her person and seems unable to achieve character more than half an inch below her vocal organs. She impresses us, in short, as one who is letter-perfect at the first rehearsal of a play which is thereupon abandoned. She is, in the second place, also possessed of so arctic a personality, despite her attractiveness of face and figure, that her performances take on the air of an *Icetime Of 1948*, minus only such a show's proficiency and audience appeal. She is so cold that a spectator is sometimes surprised that a frosty mist does not issue from her mouth when she opens it to speak her lines. And, thirdly, that chill is accompanied always by one of the most damaging qualities in an actress, which is the suggestion that her mind is constantly operating over rather than under her lines and is putting her emotions in their place, with a whip. She should learn her Rachel. "Think out your role thoroughly before the curtain goes up," said that famous actress, "and then forget everything and let go." Even in roles themselves intrinsically cold, like this Hedda, Miss Le Gallienne carries ice to Newfoundland.

She additionally exploits herself too greatly in other directions wherein her competences are doubtful. She sets herself to adapt various classics to her personal advantage as an actress and in the process rips much of their life from them. She sets herself to direct plays, and her direction imparts to her fellow players either a share of her own refrigeration or here and there such a violently contrasting heat that the stage seems to be occupied by a number of firemen feverishly trying to put out a Frigidaire. And, when serving in the capacity of her own producer, she allows her conviction that she is gifted with histrionic versatility to resolve itself into repertory programs which only accentuate her shortcomings.

"I begin to have hopes of a great metropolitan vogue for that lady now," Shaw once wrote ironically of Janet Achurch after viewing her performance as Shakespeare's

Cleopatra, "since she has at last done something that is thoroughly wrong from beginning to end." Were he to have seen Miss Le Gallienne's Mrs. Alving and Hedda, he would, I fear, have omitted fifty percent of the sentence.

There are several different justifiable ways to play Hedda, but Miss Le Gallienne's is not, I feel, among them. Connoisseurs of the absurd may, for example, recall with delight her previous venture into the role some years ago when she equipped it with a modern sports costume and a carton of Lucky Strike cigarettes, and further played it as if Hedda had just stepped into it for a few minutes from a Michael Arlen comedy and was on her impatient way into one by Maugham. In this later interpretation she does not permit her idiosyncrasies to go quite that far, but she nevertheless gives every evidence of still accepting too literally Grant Allen's nineteenth century view of Hedda: "I take her into dinner twice a week," and of believing that the character is out of the pages of *Town And Country*, that the Stork Club is situated just around the corner from Tesman's house, and that Lovborg in some ways resembles Don Ameche. In other words, her attempt to invest the character with an approximate modernity invests it only with caricature.

I appreciate that almost everyone has his prejudice as to the one manner in which Hedda is best to be played and that, for all the fact that I personally do not hold anything of the kind and believe, as I have said, that there are several ways in which the role may honestly be acted, I nevertheless will be charged by the reader with the single conception. Very well, I accept. My idea of the way it should be played is to play it for the greater part in exactly the opposite way to the way Miss Le Gallienne plays it. Which is to say to act its cold calculation into some projectional warmth; to compose its artful deliberation not merely and solely in features set into an expression which hints at a paralysis of the facial muscles; to realize that under its icy surface, as under all icy surfaces, there is fluidity, and that that fluidity is not without some depth; and practically to dramatize the periodic absence of what is con-

ventionally called emotion not into a vacuum but into something at least histrionically implicative.

One of Miss Le Gallienne's severest personal and professional handicaps seems to be a lack of humor. It is, for example, her periodic observation to interviewers, as it is Miss Margaret Webster's, her associate in various productions, that she has little use for criticism of her endeavors and that, accordingly, she does not elect to read what the critics say of them. As one of the critics whom she does not choose to read, I certainly have no criticism of her on that score. But, though she says that she does not read criticism, she seems in some occult way nevertheless to wax very angry at what the critics whom she does not read have written of her and her enterprises, as does also Miss Webster, which, it may be allowed, is slightly puzzling even to the more accomplished rebus addicts. I do not say that my or anyone else's criticisms of her work would, if she read them, be of benefit to Miss Le Gallienne, since she is evidently altogether sure of herself as she is. But if she were imaginably to read them and did not like them, it would, I think, be advantageous to an acquisition of the humor she presently lacks, and to consequent ingratiating publicity which she could stand, were she to profit by a lesson from the late G. K. Chesterton.

Chesterton, though few of his admirers, I believe, are aware of it, once essayed for an English provincial newspaper the role of dramatic critic and proved himself very apt at it. The occasion was a reply to the practising critics of the time who had found fault with his venture into dramaturgy, the play called *Magic*. Since it has never to my knowledge been printed in this country, I here quote from it at some length, in the conviction that it should prove instructive to those of our American playwrights like Maxwell Anderson, Clifford Odets, *et al.*, who have worked themselves into a mighty indignation and rancor when critics have similarly found fault with their exhibits as well as, obliquely, to actresses like this Miss Le Gallienne.

"The author of *Magic*," wrote Chesterton, "ought to be

told plainly that his play, like most other efforts of that person, has been treated with far too much indulgence in the public press. I will glide mercifully over the more glaring errors which the critics have overlooked — as that no Irishman could become so complete a cad merely by going to America; that no young lady would walk about in the rain so soon before it was necessary to dress for dinner; that no young man, however American, could run around a duke's grounds in the time between one bad epigram and another; that dukes never allow the middle classes to encroach on their gardens so as to permit a doctor's lamp to be seen there; that no sister, however eccentric, could conduct a slightly frivolous love scene with a brother going mad in the next room; that the secretary disappears half-way through the play without explaining himself; and that the conjuror disappears at the end with almost equal dignity. Such are the candid criticisms I should address to Mr. G. K. Chesterton were he my friend. But as I have always found him my worst enemy, I will confine myself to the criticism which seems to me most fundamental and final.

"Of course, I shall not differ from any of the dramatic critics: I am bursting with pride to think that I am (for the first time) a dramatic critic myself. Besides, I never argue except when I am right. It is rather a curious coincidence that in every controversy in which I have been hitherto I have always been entirely right. But if I pretended for one moment that *Magic* was not a badly written play, I should be entirely wrong. I may be allowed to point out the secret of its badness.

"By the exercise of that knowledge of all human hearts which descends on any man (however unworthy) the moment he is a dramatic critic, I perceive that the author of *Magic* originally wrote it as a short story. It is a bad play because it was a good short story. In a short story of mystery, as in a Sherlock Holmes story, the author and the hero (or villain) keep the reader out of the secret. Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes know all about it; and everybody else feels as silly as Watson. But the drama is built

on that grander secrecy which was called the Greek irony. In the drama the audience must know the truth when the actors do not know it. That is where the drama is truly democratic; not because the audience shouts, but because it knows — and is silent. Now I do quite seriously think it is a weakness in a play like *Magic* that the audience is not in the central secret from the start. Mr. G. S. Street put the point with his usual unerring simplicity by saying that he could not help feeling disappointed with the conjuror because he had hoped he would turn into the devil. If any one knows any real answer to this genuine and germane criticism, I will see that it is conveyed to the author.

“There are two more criticisms of which I will take note, because they can best be dealt with by an impartial critic like myself. The first concerns that paralysis of the mind which scientists now call Pragmatism, and which is represented in this play as freezing for an instant the intellect of an Anglican priest. I know it is ignominious to talk of artistic aims that aim and do not hit. But the idea of the skepticism of the priest was perfectly simple. It was that there should be no faith or fancy left to support the supernatural, but only the experience of it. There is one man who believes — and he believes so strongly that he wishes he didn't. . . .

“The other criticism which the present critic may criticize is the frequent observation that a soliloquy is old-fashioned — and by ‘old-fashioned’ they always mean artificial or unnatural. Now, I should say that a soliloquy is the most natural thing in the world. It is no more artificial than a conscience or a habit of walking about the room. I constantly talk to myself. If a man does not talk to himself it is because he is not worth talking to. Soliloquy is simply the strength and liberty of the soul, without which each man of us would be like that nobleman in one of the most brilliant and bizarre of Mr. Henry James's tales who did not exist at all except when others were present. Every man ought to be able to argue with himself. And I have tried to do it in this article.”

ME AND MOLLY. FEBRUARY 26, 1948

A comedy by Gertrude Berg. Produced by Oliver Smith, Paul Feigay and Herbert Kenwith in association with David Cummings for the rest of the season's performances in the Belasco Theatre.

PROGRAM

MAX	Henry Lascoe	JAKE GOLDBERG	Philip Loeb
JOE	Michael Enserro	COUSIN SIMON	Louis Sorin
MRS. 2-C	Paula Miller	MR. MENDEL	David Opatoshu
HYMIE	Arthur Cassel	VERA WERTHEIMER	
BENJY	Charles Furman		Margaret Feury
MILTY	Herbie Hahn	PIANO MAN	George Spelvin
MOLLY GOLDBERG	Gertrude Berg	MRS. GROSS	Sarah Krohner
UNCLE DAVID	Eli Mintz	MIKE	David Burke
SAMMY GOLDBERG	Lester Carr	MRS. 3-C	Bessie Samose Blumstein
ROSIE GOLDBERG	Joan Lazer	JESSIE	Phyllis Liverman
MRS. SIEGEL	Bertha Walden	MRS. ELLENBOGEN	Sally Schor

SYNOPSIS: *The action takes place in an apartment in the Bronx. The year is 1919. Act I. Scene 1. An afternoon in February. Scene 2. An evening, three weeks later. Scene 3. Several days later. Act II. Scene 1. An afternoon in April. Scene 2. Several weeks later. Scene 3. An evening, mid-summer. Act III. A Saturday in September.*

Director: Ezra Stone.

THE PLAY is an offspring of the radio serial called *The Goldbergs*, of which Mrs. Berg is also the author. The serial has been running on the air, I am told, for over sixteen years and has more devotees than *Hamlet* has managed to acquire in over three centuries. Though I have never heard any part of it, my intuition tells me that it must be pretty primitive stuff, not because any such wholesale popular devotion is necessarily always incompatible with merit, but because all such radio soap operas can not in their very nature be otherwise, unless one believes in miracles, which have been inconveniently remiss for nineteen centuries.

The idea that one should presume to express any such

opinion about something one has never heard or seen is, of course, execrable to many people, among them those who have to see a glue factory before they will believe that it is one and who regard the strong and unmistakable empyreuma which they smell a mile away as unsubstantial evidence. It is these same skeptics who impeached me when some time ago I observed that, while I had not gone to the moving pictures since women started talking, I nevertheless deemed them in the aggregate only fifth-rate, maybe even only tenth-rate, theatre. Though, in truth, I had seen several of the pictures, I did not wish to weaken my argument by admitting the fact and contented myself with the further observation that any moron could go to the movies and learn that they were what I had said they were, but that it required intelligence *not* to go to them and know it. One does not have to go to the Flatbush garbage dump every week to appreciate that it isn't Paris. Nor, in the same way, does one have to listen to such radio programs as *The Goldbergs* to know that they are rubbish.

It all resolves itself, it need hardly be confided, into a question of personal taste, and, while my own taste in amusement may sometimes be of the low order that includes old-fashioned burlesque shows, slapstick comics, the more vulgar circus clowns, and grand opera in English, it does not embrace anything quite so unelevated as such air bills. And the idea of making plays out of them and thus punishing me in the professional arbitrary necessity for seeing them is carrying things, if I may be so selfish as to say so, too far.

The play made from one of them is in this case scarcely a play at all, but rather a stage-televised radio show without commercial interruptions. Its intention is to portray a humble Jewish family that has moved from the lower East Side to the Bronx and its difficulties in adjusting its economics to the more exclusive environment. Since it deals sympathetically with Jewish people, its bad writing and worse dramaturgy are as usual cautiously condoned by the newspaper brethren in the allowance that, anyway and above all, "its heart is in the right place," as if a heart

in the right place were one of the ultimate desiderata of drama, a notion that engenders the disturbing thought that plays without a heart in the right place are seriously deficient and that such, for example, as a number of Ibsen's, Strindberg's and Shaw's, among a lot of others, are not what we have long esteemed them to be.

As in various such Jewish folk plays, the spectacle is compounded of all the stereotypes of the species: the young daughter with musical ambitions who dreams of the day when she will have a piano and whose dream brings heartaches to her parents who can not afford one; the paterfamilias who encounters the customary difficulties in establishing himself in the dress business; the neighborhood types who troop in and out and fill in the atmosphere with dialect; and the stipulated elaborate matchmaking on behalf of a young neighborhood girl and a shy suitor. Also in evidence are the moving van men of sardonic mien one of whom with a small trunk on his back staggers in as if he were carrying a loaded freight car; the frequent borrowing of food and household articles by the neighbors; the kitchen jars in which the mother stores her small savings; and the children, including the brash young son who wants to be an inventor and who answers his doubtful parents by comparing his youthful position with that of Edison, all given to scooting in and out of the premises on roller skates. To say nothing of the old uncle who sits aside and vouchsafes homely philosophies; the fat mother's comical trying on of a party dress; the radical young Jew who ventilates his opinions, to the distress of the orthodox family, on all occasions; the scene in which the mother and father prepare for bed and provide amusement by appearing in old-fashioned nightgowns; the mother's tender solicitude for the father when business disappointment overtakes him; and the last minute good news which, at the height of his dejection, promises that he will soon be worth a million dollars.

The author's dialect dialogue is apparently derived less from a close audition of such people as she depicts than from a sedulous attendance on old-time vaudeville

sketches. While my personal knowledge of such patois is based wholly on the writings and plays of Montague Glass, Arthur Kober and others whose ears have been endorsed by people in a position to know, I entertain large doubts if such stuff as "I'll go put an eye in the soup," "your liver is standing on the table," and "take off your head" (for "get your mind off the subject,") has any authenticity.

Mrs. Berg's play, in a word, is theatrical hokum which the theatre exorcised years ago as outmoded and which since has evidently found a prosperous haven on the radio. It is, moreover, acted in terms of an old Aaron Hoffman two-a-day sketch, except for the honest performance of a child named Joan Lazer; it is directed by Ezra Stone in terms of a color-blind traffic policeman; its scenery by Harry Horner showing a three-room flat set into a frame of skeletonized surrounding buildings looks as if it had been assembled from storehouse odds and ends; its sentiment is turned on and off like a sugar tap on a maple tree; and its two and one-half hours' attempt at humor does not produce a single laugh comparable to any one of a dozen in the fifteen-minute Jewish movie skit in *Make Mine Manhattan*.

THE LINDEN TREE. MARCH 2, 1948

A play by J. B. Priestley. Produced by Maurice Evans for 7 performances in the Music Box.

PROGRAM

MRS. COTTON	<i>Una O'Connor</i>	EDITH WESTMORE	<i>Mary Kimber</i>
ALFRED LOCKHART	<i>Noel Leslie</i>	DINAH LINDEN	<i>Marilyn Erskine</i>
MRS. LINDEN	<i>Barbara Everest</i>	PROFESSOR LINDEN	<i>Boris Karloff</i>
REX LINDEN	<i>Halliwel Hobbes, Jr.</i>	BERNARD FAWCETT	
JEAN LINDEN	<i>Viola Keats</i>		<i>Emmett Rogers</i>
MARION LINDEN	<i>Cathleen Cordell</i>		

SYNOPSIS: *The action takes place in Professor Linden's study in the provincial city of Brumanley in northern England. Early spring, at the present time. Act I. Friday. Scene 1. Late afternoon. Scene 2. Two hours later. Act II. Saturday. Scene 1. Afternoon. Scene 2. Night, several hours later.*

Director: *George Schaefer.*

ONE OF THE most touching examples of the art of press-agentry since Anna Held's milk, Jess Dandy's beer and Earl Carroll's champagne baths was the attempt to stir up some excitement over the fact that Boris Karloff, the screen ghoul, acted in this play, which marked his temporary departure from Hollywood, the role of a normal human being. It might have worked in the movies, since if in that medium an actor goes even so far as to shave off his established little mustache for a role not only is he hailed as an artist of such versatility as has not been heard of in the world since Leonardo da Vinci, but they have to add extra ushers in the film houses to handle the aghast and admiring crowds. In the theatre, however, the circumstance that an actor can play two markedly different kinds of roles is regarded not as a phenomenon but, if he can not do it, rather as an indication that he ought to go back to dramatic school and take lessons along with the other amateurs.

In the theatre, in short, a Mansfield celebrated for his

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde jumps easily from a Prince Karl to a Cyrano, and even a supposed one-role actor like John Drew from dress suit elegants to Richard Carvel and Shakespeare. William Faversham played everything from Lord Algy to Stephen Phillips' Herod; Nat Goodwin, though a hamfatter, was nevertheless equally at ease as Marc Antony and the buckeroo in *The Cowboy And The Lady*; and David Warfield was great stuff in both Weber and Fields burlesque and Peter Grimm. Today, youngsters like Marlon Brando play the poet Marchbanks one year and the tough Kowalski the next, and like David Wayne even a musical show leprechaun and a dramatic naval ensign in the same season.

What impression Mr. Karloff made in the theatre was based not on his ability to play a role which was the extreme opposite of his screen roles, but on his ability to play a role which, unlike his movie roles, called for something approaching acting. His performances in the films have been confined largely to hideous makeups and the appropriate accompanying faces. They have been to acting what sulphuric acid is to counterfeiting; in other words, the dripping of a caustic solution on a personality plate. In his stage role, that of a university professor, he found himself with his old hokum makeup off and his pants down. No longer could he be an actor in dressing-room name only; he had to act. That he came off pretty well was no credit to versatility, since what he has been showing on the screen has not been any versatility of his own but Perc Westmore's, and what he has been doing has not been acting but merely Hallowe'en child's-play. It was a credit rather to his realization that acting must go a little deeper than painting one's face to look like curdled pea soup and fastening on six-inch finger claws, and that it must have some concern with character beyond popping out eyeballs and growling like a bad-natured dachshund.

Mr. Karloff's vehicle, a prompt failure, was roughly to be described as Donald Ogden Stewart's unlamented *How I Wonder* rid of its metaphysical nonsense and given some

slight clarity by a more adult playwright. The story, with family overtones, again was of a professor whose ideas get him into trouble with the college officials, who is removed from the faculty, who refuses to give up his theories and gracefully retire, and who determinedly sticks to his guns in the belief that he can help in solving some of the problems that presently beset mankind. And the aforesaid theories once again dealt with the chaos of modern existence, the responsibilities of the individual, the atom bomb, etc. And once again, too, it all proved that Priestley can overtalk a play into a dramatic coma in no time and that it would benefit him greatly to reserve some of the talk to persuade himself that, if he were to take a little more care with his plays, they might get somewhere. His habit of turning out three or four a year not only botches his unquestioned gifts but so confuses his head that they sometimes seem ridiculous. In this play, for one example, he asks us to accept sympathetically as an important mind a history professor who stoutly believes in his competence to analyze England's and the world's current ills and who yet eventually finds that he has made an awful boner in the very beginning (the second sentence, in fact) of his treatise on the subject. And most of the rest of the ideas, such, in further example, as that old age and tender youth are alone able to decide what is right and what is wrong seem to be more aptly suited to a Tin Pan Alley song writer than to a dramatist who invites us to take him seriously.

The damaging haste in which the play was written betrays itself as well in other of its confusions. The only presented specimens of the kind of people the professor might influence are two young students. One of these is a girl more concerned with the shade of lipstick suitable to her and with making an impression on the professor's rich son than with any history he tries to teach her. The other is a loud, brash oaf who not only pays little or no attention to what the professor tries to explain to him, but who is not averse to imposing his own incontinent opinions on him. The sole believer in the professor's doctrines is shown by the playwright to be his youngest daughter, yet

when he attempts at the final curtain to elucidate them to her, she becomes so bored that she falls asleep while he is talking. The philosophy that only the very young and very old are able to do anything to rectify the world's impulse to wars becomes a little perplexing in light of the fact that it is the young whose spirit of adventure notoriously propels them proudly into wars and the old who have long maneuvered them into them. The collateral notion that only the young and old are blessed with spirituality and that the middle-aged are ever utterly devoid of it is too foolish to be considered. Additional similarly choice articles in Mr. Priestley's credo are his belief that an understanding of history would assist the peace of the world, an argument which seems to overlook the ample historical education of many of those who have provoked wars; his conviction that there is something subversive of social morality in living well and having a pleasant time once in a while; and his idea that a man who works without thought of monetary reward is always *ipso facto* a more worthy one than one who operates more practically.

It is evidently Mr. Priestley's further idea that all that is necessary to convert two and a half hours of such speeches into a play is to drop into them every now and then a "my dear Jean," a "are you listening, my darling?," or a "as I was saying to Professor Lockhart," and meanwhile to stuff a pipe. What it comes to, one fears, is rather a poor novel attemptedly made theatrical by periodically inserting a curtain into it instead of a book-mark. And what it sounds like is not a play but a non-stop phonograph, out of tune.

The acting, except for Karloff, Barbara Everest as his wife, and Viola Keats as his love-forsaken daughter with scientific inclinations, was without any flair, though Emmett Rogers as the young student contrived to picture a man with a chronic cold in the nose with an unusual realism. The direction followed the regulation pattern of insinuating some movement into a static play by having the characters stand and walk around the room when normally they would have remained quietly seated and in

causing the actors so intensely to listen to one another's speeches — under the common stage delusion that such listening catches an illusion of reality — that they all gave the impression of being victims of deafness. It also permitted Una O'Connor to play the comedy-relief household servant role with such vaudeville excess that one was disappointed when she made her entrances unaccompanied by a straight man or a trick dog. Peter Wolf's setting of the professor's study looked so cosy, comfortable and altogether desirable that it was hard to sympathize with his family's constant allusions to it as intolerable. And the stage lighting, by whoever was responsible, was, as is often the case, focused with such severity upon the players that the ladies in the company, young as well as old, all seemed to have accordion-pleated necks and eyes like Bluepoint oysters.

 THE HALLAMS. MARCH 4, 1948

A play by Rose Franken. Produced by William Brown Meloney for 12 performances in the Booth Theatre.

PROGRAM

MRS. HALLAM	<i>Ethel Griffies</i>	WALTER HALLAM	<i>Matt Briggs</i>
ETTA HALLAM	<i>Mildred Dunnoek</i>	HARRY HALLAM	<i>Frank M. Thomas</i>
PAUL HALLAM	<i>Royal Beal</i>	MR. HALLAM	<i>John McKee</i>
GRACE HALLAM	<i>June Walker</i>	JERRY HALLAM	<i>Dean Norton</i>
HELEN HALLAM	<i>Mildred Wall</i>	KENDRICK HALLAM	<i>Katharine Bard</i>
VICTOR HALLAM	<i>Alan Baxter</i>		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene: *Dining-room of the Hallam residence in the east seventies. Manhattan. Time: An evening in spring.* Act II. Scene: *Jerry and Kendrick's apartment. Time: Two weeks later.* Act III. Scene: *The same as Act I. Time: The following afternoon.*

Director: *Rose Franken.*

THERE ARE NOT many American writers for the stage who have a better appreciation of character and motive than Miss Franken. In even her poorer plays she here and there indicates a perception in those directions which, however insolvent they otherwise are, lends them at least a degree of conviction. It is, with minor exception, her fault that she imbeds the attributes in materials unworthy of them. Character and motive, in other words, commendable as they are, are frequently made to suffer by setting them in an inferior dramatic structure, like precious stones set in brass.

That character is infinitely more important than plot obviously need not be re-stated. But it is not merely plot that is referred to, though most of hers are either rehashes of old, familiar ones or give the effect of having been festooned around the characters like pink paper streamers, mostly faded. What one has in mind is rather the fact that these plots do not appear to be an outgrowth of her characters but seem to be arbitrarily conjured up after-thoughts forced upon them, much after the manner of sashes san-

guinely added to dresses that look too plain. It is for this reason that this present family play, the seventy-fourth of one sort or another in the last six seasons, while welcoming the excursions into cosmic philosophies dear to the fancy of the Priestleys and while endorsable in some of its character appraisal and observation of detail, misses in satisfaction. There are, as well, other reasons. Though, as noted, the author deals honestly with most of her people, they are, alas, essentially dull people and she has not the genius, as had Chekhov and Hauptmann, to make dullness dramatically and theatrically alive and interesting. The characters, with two exceptions, are interesting individually as faithfully recorded examples of their dull species, but their dullness in combination not only dampens the general picture but contrives to detract dramatically from the studies of them singly. As clinical specimens, in short, they are one by one creditable, but in congress assembled they give the clinic a morguish color.

There is still another slightly distracting element in the play. As in her *Another Language*, of which the present exhibit is what she describes as a progression in the lives of the same Hallam family, and as in one or two of her subsequently written plays, the characters, though presented as Gentiles, essentially have many of the unmistakable attributes and qualities of Jews. *Another Language*, in fact, was, we are informed, originally written as a Jewish play whose Jewish characters were given Christian names, with no other changes in them, when Miss Franken was persuaded by her producer, Arthur Beckhard, that it would thereby probably attract a much wider audience. Miss Franken seems since at times to have written Jewish characters under the delusion that they are not Jewish, with the result in this latest play that, when her Gentile matriarch objects to a granddaughter's marriage to a Jew, the audience's feeling is that it would have been much more realistic if she objected to him because he was a Baptist. That she is able to make one critically accept and believe in her characters in spite of such intrusive

qualifications is a tribute to her considerable gift. In only two instances, as observed, does her skill here desert her. Her girl who marries the Hallam grandson is a lay figure out of the kind of thing, known in the vernacular as soap opera, which women who have nothing more cultural than dish-washing to occupy them in the daytime listen to on the radio. Her tubercular grandson is no less a figure derived from the same source. And the dialogue which she has supplied the twain stems directly from a like font.

The story concerns the opposition of an autocratic matriarch to the young wife whom the consumptive has introduced into the family's midst, with her efforts to separate the couple, with the wife's determination to remain by her husband's side during his illness, with his death, and with the ultimate mellowing of the matriarch toward her and the hint that she will find release from her grief in the connubial arms of the youngest of the matriarch's sons.

The author's stage direction of her play is first-rate; she contrives to give it a sense of natural life even when it is remiss in it. And some of the performances, notably those of Ethel Griffies as the matriarch and Mildred Wall as an outspoken in-law, are very good. The particular weakness is in those of Dean Norton and Katharine Bard as the young married couple, though their roles are partly responsible. But responsible or not, both are out of acting key with the general acting composition of the play. Norton portrays the tuberculosis victim much as if the disease he is suffering from were heliencephalitis, or inflammation of the brain from exposure to the sun, complicated by an especially aggravated case of arrested development. And Miss Bard, an attractive young person, permits a studied elocutionary delivery to rob the wife character of any possible small vestige of truth.

Many years ago, David Belasco propounded the idea that to the established three dramatic unities there should be added theatrically what he described as the unity of blood. In other words, that in a play like this the direct members of a family should be cast with actors whose looks at least in some measure suggest that they are related

by blood-ties and not, as is so often the case, with actors whose appearances belie any conceivable remotest relationship. The casting of the several sons of the matriarch and her husband in this instance hinted at a big scandal in the old lady's early life, since the looks and every other thing about them precluded any reasonable supposition of their legitimacy.

A TEMPORARY ISLAND. MARCH 14, 1948

A play by Halstead Welles, with songs by Lorenzo Fuller and calliope music by Lehman Engel. Produced by the Experimental Theatre, Inc., for 6 performances in the Maxine Elliott Theatre.

PROGRAM

CORDELIA	Nancy Franklin	MR. BOUTOURLINSKY	
HELOISE	Karen Lindgren		Walter Palance
BUNNY	Rita Gam	MRS. BOUTOURLINSKY	Ann Sullivan
MISS EVANS	Jane Hoffman	MR. SMITH	Taylor Graves
MISS RECTOR	Hilda Vaughn	UNCLE BENNY	Ernest Truex
MR. FISK	Philip Bourneuf	SOPHOMORE	Shirley Ames
MISS WAMPSEY	Philippa Bevans	SENIOR	Anne-Marie Gayer
MR. TOTININGHAM	Blair Davies	FRESHMAN	Elaine Bradford
MR. CHANTER	Harrison Dowd	FARMER	Carl Judd
MR. AVERY	Gregory Robins	FARMER'S WIFE	Natalie Benisch
JUNIUS	Bill Dillard	FARMER'S DAUGHTER	
NED	Bill Myers		Winnie Mae Martin
MR. PRINCE	Leon Askin	CHIEF OF POLICE	Gene Galvin
SUZETTE	Vera Zorina	POLICEMAN	Geoffrey Lumb
FELICITY	Ruth Vaughn	MILLHAND	Dion Allen

SYNOPSIS: *The action takes place in a New England town between 11 a.m., May 29, and the dawn of May 30, 1881. Act I. Scene 1. The office of the President of the Massachusetts Female Seminary. Scene 2. A willow grove across the canal. Act II. Scene 1. The willow grove. Scene 2. Circus tent — main entrance.*

Director: Halstead Welles.

NOT EVERY ADULT in a state of arrested boyhood has wanted to run off and join a circus. There are some who do not. They prefer to stay at home and enjoy the experience vicariously in writing plays about doing it. Mr. Welles is one such. A college teacher by profession, he visualizes himself in that capacity as a stage character who is invested with the moral responsibility of chasing an itinerant circus out of the campus environment. In the line of his imposed duty, he falls in love with one Mlle. Suzette, a beautiful

equestrienne, and is overwhelmed by a desire to join up and follow his beloved. In the end, however, Mr. Welles, even more greatly overwhelmed by the morality imposed upon him by his calling, causes his hero-self to doubt the propriety and wisdom of any such happy course and sends his replica safely back to the classroom.

In *Polly Of The Circus*, produced more than three decades ago, it was a gentleman of the cloth who was made to follow much the same procedure with a fair equestrienne, though in that case he was not such a poltroon and remained with his inamorata. And before then and since, we have been presented both here and abroad with various paraphrases of the theme.

Mr. Welles' play, like most of the others, is hardly a pippin, in fact, infinitely less of one than any of the species we have hitherto engaged. It gives the impression that the very idea of doing any such thing as considering even for a moment an attachment for a circus lady is offensive to his sense of respectability. One furthermore gains the impression that he is a little ashamed of having thought of such a shocking idea and is determined cautiously to edge around it by relating it in language, and tons of it, that will evade the direct issue. It is his device, accordingly, to distract attention from his theme with a plenitude of subsidiary characters and episodes and with such high-sounding and aimless talk as suggests that it was assembled from the careless thumbing of a thesaurus. The final effect is of his having dropped what he daringly treasured as a diamond of an idea into a jar of hydro-fluoric acid and its complete disintegration and disappearance.

The author's direction of his play only confounded it the more, and the performances were mostly in the non-descript, routine mold.

I should like to add a word on the stage lighting, which will fit that of numerous other productions as well. Little, it seems to me, has been more damaging to these productions than the kind of theoretically improved illumination which for years now has been poorly adapted from European sources. While its intent is admirable, its accomplish-

ment is often disastrous. Not only does it so trickily light plays that one's attention is frequently focused on its elaborate mechanical performances to the plays' loss, but it so overdoes the lighting of the actors and actresses that they seem much less to be the characters they are supposed to be than suspects in a police lineup in a jail run by Dizzy Gillespie. In the case of the ladies, the situation, as I have noted in an earlier chapter, is especially embarrassing. I frequently wonder, indeed, if Lillian Russell would have achieved her great reputation as a beauty had she been lighted by Moe Hack, or if Irene Bentley, Lotta Faust and all those lovely girls would still sing in our memories had they been lighted by other of our current geniuses. Whenever I go to a theatre these days and, before the curtain rises, observe enough balcony and proscenium projectors to illuminate a half dozen Mardi Gras carnivals and, after it rises, some thirty thousand dollars' worth of stage equipment to amplify them, I not only feel sorry for the poor actresses who are about to suffer their combined challenge of nose, chin, and neck shadows, but think back, not without a sigh, to the days when simple footlights, a couple of gelatine slides in the wings, and a single gallery spotlight made better plays perfectly acceptable and the actresses in them look like human beings and not, as nowadays, like dried apricots smeared with whitewash.

YOU NEVER CAN TELL. MARCH 16, 1948

A revival of the comedy by George Bernard Shaw. Produced by the Theatre Guild in association with Alfred Fischer for 5 weeks' performances in the Martin Beck Theatre.

PROGRAM

DOLLY	Patricia Kirkland	GLORIA	Faith Brook
VALENTINE	Tom Helmore	CRAMPTON	Ralph Forbes
MAID	Scott Douglas	McCOMAS	Walter Hudd
PHILIP	Nigel Stock	WAITER	Leo G. Carroll
MRS. CLANDON	Frieda Inescort	BOHUN	William Devlin

SYNOPSIS: *The action takes place at a seaside resort in Devon, England, in August, 1896. Act I. Valentine's room. Morning. Act II. The terrace of the Marine Hotel. Noon. Act III. A sitting-room in the hotel. Afternoon. Act IV. Same as Act III. Evening.*

Director: Peter Ashmore.

I HAVE ALWAYS cast my plays," once saucily wrote Shaw, "in the ordinary practical comedy form in use at all theatres; and far from taking an unsympathetic view of the popular preference for fun, fashionable dresses, a little music, and even an exhibition of eating and drinking by people with an expensive air, attended by an if-possible-comic waiter, I was more than willing to show that the drama can humanize these things as easily as they, in undramatic hands, can dehumanize the drama." *You Never Can Tell* jinksfully follows that pattern and after fifty-one years still retains a deal of its original amusement. Not only did Shaw thus snatch any contemplated facetiousness out of its critics' mouths, but he added injury to insult by insisting that he had written the comedy practically to order. In his own frank manner he allowed that it was an attempt to comply with the many requests for a play in which the much paraphrased brilliancy of *Arms And The Man* should be tempered by some consideration for the requirements of managers in search of fashionable comedies for West End

theatres. The critics, of course, as was their habit, declined to take his word for it and again put down both statements as examples of his customary prankishness. But he was nevertheless telling the perfect truth and simply garbing it in humor, which always has the effect on dimwits of making it dubious and unacceptable for what it really is.

Some of the once pert wrinkles in the farce-comedy are now, as might be expected, not quite so salty and some of the devices have since been repeated in the theatre to their later day debility. But once more the old rascal's lively wit, character observation and literary velvet come to the rescue and make even some of the drier aspects of the play bubble. He proves, as always he has, that an ability to handle the English language, despite the apparent superstition of a large number of our American playwrights, is quite as important an asset as the ability to handle the stage, and that it also is not such an odious notion, when you are writing a comedy, to have a few ideas lying around. That some of these ideas, to repeat, have rusted is not news, except to those who are so surprised at any ideas at all in a play that they consider their simple presence not only a token of ultra-modernity but even insurrectionary. But, if some of the conceits have faded, the play on the whole has not, since Shaw's character sense and sense of intelligent comedy and even farce retain their gay attraction. And, above all, there is the magnetism of his superior nonchalance. As usual, he masters the trick of making his audiences think that the play was just tossed off casually; that he considers it more or less a trifle; that if it is entertaining he could handily, if he wished to trouble himself, make it three times as entertaining; and that what ideas he peddles in it are only minor samples of his wholesale stock.

That is one of the most captivating of his many captivating subterfuges. The plays of nine-tenths of our playwrights have the air of being their entire immediate capital. They suggest that they have given their all to them, and that there remains nothing more for them to say on the subjects. But, save possibly for *Saint Joan*, there has not been a play of Shaw's which hasn't insinuated that, were

he to choose to do so, he might unload into it resources which he has not even faintly touched. In this lies perhaps the reason for at least a small measure of his intellectual celebrity. He is a past-master of the stratagem of intellectuality by suggestion. By throwing out merely intimations of profundity, shrewdly couched in what seems an off-hand wit and humor, he not only persuades his auditors that he regards them as simply the foam on his cerebral beer, but tantalizes them like so many fish jumping at quickly withdrawn bait. This is plainly not to say that he hasn't a mind superior to every other dramatist of his time. It is rather to say that he fully appreciates the theatrical value of merchandising it only piecemeal and substituting implication for what in the very nature of a theatrical audience would be tiring complete statement.

It is thus that what is usually called Shaw's audacity is not audacity at all, but caution. If he were really audacious, he would let himself go and talk his audience brilliantly to death. But he knows that that way lies theatrical failure, and, as he himself has always^oopenly admitted, he likes the money too much to do any such foolish thing. So he foxily restrains himself and, like an artful candy butcher, rattles his wares at the audience and deceives it with a magnificent spiel into believing that there are genuine diamond brooches in every twenty-five cent package.

There has not in his day and age been a dramatist-showman to match him, and there is not an expedient he does not know. Over and over again he succeeds in selling the same Crackerjack simply by wrapping it up in different colored paper and prefacing it elaborately with the old, brilliant come-on. Over and over again he bamboozles his customers through the device of making verbal surprise pass for dramatic surprise, through the trick of impressing his off-stage personality upon his on-stage activities, and through the hocus-pocus of allowing the yokels to pick the shell hiding the pea the while he cheerfully picks their pockets.

He is wonderful, is this grand old, great old boy. Age may wither him, but custom can not stale him, much. If

some of his plays date on the score of their philosophies, the spirit he has injected into them remains alive and kicking. It is that spirit, that persistently chuckling, laughing, youthful spirit, which, like the phosphorescence on the dial of even a sometimes run-down clock, outlasts the dawn.

Shaw once observed in connection with his difficulty in understanding certain foreign plays, that, while he knew it was lamentable, it was useless for him to attempt to conceal his hopeless deficiencies as a linguist. "I am very sorry," he said, "but I cannot learn languages. I have tried hard, only to find that men of ordinary capacity can learn Sanscrit in less time than it takes me to buy a German dictionary. The worst of it is that this disability of mine seems to be most humiliatingly exceptional. My colleagues sit at French plays, German plays, and Italian plays, laughing at all the jokes, thrilling with all the fine sentiments, and obviously understanding the finest shades of the language; whilst I, unless I have read the play beforehand or asked somebody during the interval what it is about, must either struggle with a sixpenny 'synopsis' which invariably misses the real point of the drama, or else sit with a guilty conscience and a blank countenance, drawing the most extravagantly wrong inferences from the dumb show of the piece."

While I am not up on Sanscrit, I happen to know French and German and some Italian and so, unlike Shaw, do not suffer too much trouble with plays in those languages, apart from the ability inconveniently to understand quite a number of them. My difficulty, unlike Shaw, lies in understanding plays in English, even if there conceivably is something to understand in them, when they are played by supposedly English-speaking actors from England. The manner of speech employed by many of them is not only Sanscrit but Greek and even Choctaw to my ears; I know in a vague way that it is English, even if the sounds are not familiar to me; but I can not for the life of me, strain as I will, make out what they represent and what the actors are talking about. And if the play is

couched in the Cockney dialect, it might as well, so far as I am concerned, be in pig-Latin.

I am told that all this indicates simply that I am an American with the usual overtones of vulgarity and hence incapable of appreciating and assimilating the British linguistic elegances. Perhaps. But I nevertheless think it would be a little considerate of these English actors when they come over to my vulgar country to learn, on behalf of the many vulgar Americans like me who have to foot the bill, to vulgarize their speech at least to the small point where we could make head or tail of it.

It is the chief merit of the present production of the Shaw comedy that it has been cast not only with some English actors who exceptionally speak the tongue with a sufficient respect for American ears but in greater part with English actors who have been working over here for years and who have thus achieved a welcome clarity of diction. The stage direction, however, is often so atrocious, what with its conversion of the juveniles into leap-frog players and its self-consciousness in the verbal delivery of the Shavian whimsicalities, that much of the humor to its distress is rammed into the audience with a sledge-hammer. Tom Helmore, in the Valentine role, is furthermore allowed so many acrobatics, accompanied by a fixed music show grin, that all he seems to lack is a pair of hard shoes to amplify his performance with an occasional tap dance. The rest, especially Leo G. Carroll as the waiter, Walter Hudd as the solicitor McComas, and William Devlin as the waiter's barrister son, are good enough, though Frieda Inescort's sharply clipped reading of Mrs. Clandon has little more shading than a cactus bush and though the two young people, Nigel Stock and Patricia Kirkland, the latter the only American in the cast, are, as has been noted, privileged such an excess of animal spirits that they seem to be the progeny of the Cramptons much less than the offspring of Agnes de Mille and the late Ned Wayburn.

JOY TO THE WORLD. MARCH 18, 1948

A play by Allan Scott. Produced by John Houseman and William R. Katzell for the rest of the season's performances in the Plymouth Theatre.

PROGRAM

MARY MAGILLE	Mary Welch	DMITRI OUMANSKY	Kurt Kasznar
FLOYD	Michael Dreyfuss	BARBARA BENTON	Lucille Patton
MILDRED	Lois Hall	HENRY SAINTSBURY	
EDITH WHAM	Peggy Maley		Walter F. Appler
J. NEWTON MCKEON		SAMPSON	Hal Gerson
	Myron McCormick	MR. WILCOX	Theodore Newton
MORTIMER BEHRMAN	Leslie Litomy	HARRY	Sam Bonnell
RICHARD STANTON	Hugh Rennie	SAM BLUMENFELD	
EDWARD F. GANNON	Bert Freed		Morris Carnovsky
ALEXANDER SOREN	Alfred Drake		Beverly Thawl
TILWORTHY	Harris Brown	MESSENGERS	Blanche Zohar
ANN WOOD	Marsha Hunt		Jeanne Jorden
STEVE WALTON	Herb Ratner		Vicki Carlson
JOHN V. HOPPER	Clay Clement		

SYNOPSIS: *The entire action of the play takes place in the offices of Alexander Soren, Vice-President in charge of production of Atlas-Continental Pictures. Time: The present. Act I. Late afternoon. Act II. Scene 1. A few days later. Late at night. Scene 2. One week later. Mid-day. Act III. Two days later. Late afternoon.*

Director: Jules Dassin.

MR. SCOTT'S PLAY is the regulation Hollywood table d'hôte into which he has incorporated, as a fillip, a tirade against motion picture censorship and an impassioned plea for art on the screen. The fillip is scarcely sufficient to salt the dry materials and has the further slight handicap, as he presents it, of being asinine, since his crusading hero is a film producer whose major contributions to the estate of the cinema are announced to have been a movie called *Clara* the most classical feature of which was a scene between a man and a woman about to indulge in sexual intercourse while wrapped up in a fish net and a subse-

quent epic called *Katie* whose most colossal scene was a literal duplication of it. The author's large indignation over the threat of official suppression of such balderdash and his zeal for the æsthetic progress of the screen are consequently not without some symptoms of mirth.

The characters figuring in the twaddle are the following:

The aforesaid producer who indicates his genius by maintaining throughout the play a look of frozen contempt, by abruptly dismissing from his presence at regular intervals anyone around the moving picture studio who politely seeks counsel of him, and by constantly seizing up one or another of the numerous telephones on his desk and loudly telling the caller to go to hell.

His dry, disillusioned press-agent, given to the bottle, who periodically interrupts the proceedings with a wise-crack.

The comely young woman in charge of the studio's research department, who is a Phi Beta Kappa from a mid-Western college and hence full of ideals about the movies and who urges the hero at great length to fight compromise and to go on to higher things, which naturally causes him to succumb to her physical allure and in the end to propose marriage to her.

The chairman of the board who will not listen to any art talk, who is such a bounder that he thinks his moving picture company should make a little money, and who, when he is taken to task for his low views by the studio æsthetes, demands their immediate resignations, heatedly thrusting his pocket pen at them to accelerate matters.

The timid head of the story department, with horn-rimmed glasses.

The studio manager who blusters in and out of the producer-genius' office, which looks like a drawing-room designed by General Motors, who comments irascibly on economic waste in the studio, and who regularly gets kicked out by the producer-genius.

The loyal female secretary, ready to stick to the hero through thick and thin.

The comic office-boy, his mouth constantly agape.

The aged producer, once in the cloak and suit trade, who began in the movie business in its nickelodeon days, who has amassed a fortune in it, who sympathizes with the young director-genius' dreams as delayed dreams of his own, and who hands over to him his elaborate outfit, plus fourteen million dollars and a sentimental speech of what seems a like amount of words.

The haughty movie star, the very peak of *haut ton*.

The man who has been sitting in the outer office for weeks vainly waiting to get an audience with the great director.

The voluptuous blonde upon whom the male members of the cast clap lascivious eyes and to whom with a wink at one another they offer a screen test.

The lines provided the characters include the usual allusions to such Hollywood illuminati as Darryl Zanuck, *et al.*; the stage business includes the usual slaps on women's posteriors; and the direction in large part follows the movie chase sequence pattern. The gentleman responsible for the latter, one Dassin, a screen director by profession, observed to the press before the play opened, "I don't want to give the impression that *Joy To The World* is a propaganda play. It isn't. It's simply about a man and his job, and his job is making movies. He loves to make movies and he's good at it and when we first meet him he thinks that's all, that's enough. But by the time his experience is over in the play, he realizes that just making movies won't do, unless they reflect the good and hopefulness in you."

It was apparent that Mr. Dassin either had not read the script or, if he had, did not digest exactly what it was about. Not only is the play clearly a propaganda play, but it is, as has been noted, a propaganda play, aside from its gladiatorial jabs at censorship, for high screen art as opposed to the present Hollywood commercial product. And not only, to confound matters, does its protagonist's eventual imposing resolve take the form of a picture on Samuel Gompers which even at best could not in view of his previous competences be anything more artistically

exalted than some of the biographical films that the industry has already turned out, and not only in its nature could it not be hoped to equal such already produced and profitable art pictures as *Henry V* or, for that matter, even such art turkeys as *Mourning Becomes Electra*, but, in immediate point, it is pretty hard to reconcile an arbitrary emphasis on "good" and "hopefulness" with authentic art in any direction, whether in literature, painting, music, or even the films. There have, Mr. Dassin should be told, been neither of those boluses in what are locally venerated as some of the outstanding artistic pictures made in France and Italy, or in Germany before the war.

I am told that the idea still stubbornly flourishes in Hollywood that the New York critics are so prejudiced against screen players, "despite the stage success now and again of one or another of them," that the latter are taking their lives in their hands if they venture into the theatre. The theory should take its place in the category of other rococo ideas like technocracy, semantics, existentialism, salvarsan, and the efficiency of dog mange cures in promoting such a growth of hair on the human head as will abash the bowels of a Victorian sofa. Far from being hostile to the movie actors, the critics, it begins to look, are so favorably disposed toward them that even those who can not act at all sometimes get notices so sugary that newspaper readers economize by putting them in their breakfast coffee. The film actor who fails to get praise consequently has become such a phenomenon that people rush around to see him out of sheer curiosity, with the result that the play he is in occasionally enjoys something of a run. It is the stage player, indeed, who seems rather to suffer the critics' prejudice. Expecting much more of him, the critics make demands of him that they evidently are only too willing to remit in the case of the Hollywood immigrant. Screen actors have been charitably let down on performances that stage actors would have been vigorously denounced for, and things have come to the point where at least eight of our better young players who have

not been sufficiently approved by the local reviewers have sagaciously betaken themselves to Hollywood so that on their ultimate return they may benefit by the reviewers' newly acquired enthusiasm for them.

The records of the present season indicate clearly that the love feast for film players which got under steam last year with Ingrid Bergman, Paul Muni and James Stewart is still going full tilt. Paul Kelly, June Lockhart, Jessica Tandy, Henry Fonda, John Garfield and Ethel Griffies, among others, have got such notices as were not surpassed by those of Edwin Booth and Ada Rehan in their heyday. Screen youngsters like Kim Hunter, Joan Tetzl and Roberta Jonay have made many of the reviewers turn hand-springs that they never have on behalf of more competent kids who have always done their bathing indoors. Anthony Quinn came off almost as handsomely as ever did Jameson Lee Finney in his prime, and Boris Karloff, though his vehicle, too, was appropriately taken for a ride, got notices in general quite the equal of those once provided E. S. Willard and Sol Smith Russell. Charles Laughton was eulogized here and there for a performance so hammy that Walter Hampden would have been hung for it. And even John Loder and Neil Hamilton got by with the kind of acting that would have made show boat critics wince.

The most recent example of the attitude of the critics was to be had in the instance of Marsha Hunt, who came on from Hollywood to make her stage bow in this *Joy To The World*. Miss Hunt is a lovely and charming girl with a heap of what our fathers used confidentially to describe as sex appeal; her personality and manner are completely winning; and, since such attributes are certainly not to be sneered at even by her severest critics, I should, as one such, be only too delighted to take her out to supper any time she gives the word. But to praise this fair and delightful creature for any real dramatic acting ability, as quite a number of the colleagues have done, is, I think, going a little too far in their equally personal admiration

for her, even if she is of a pleased mind to have supper with them instead of with me, foolishly. When it comes to the matter of acting (which, of course, I would cleverly refrain from mentioning over the hot bird and cold bottle), Miss Hunt, I fear, still has something to learn.

She should be instructed, for example, that the constant pretty profile acting dear to the screen is not only dispensable on the stage but, if indulged in, ruinous by reason of its obvious self-consciousness. She should also have been told that, while it is all very well never to look directly into the camera, a desperately painstaking aversion of the eyes from the stage's fourth wall takes on a strained and studied air that can be disquieting. She should furthermore be coached out of the restricted physical movement appropriate to screen photography and into a fluidity more relevant to the stage. And she should, too, guard her enunciation and not pronounce "specific" as "suspific" and "obsolete" as "obsolit," or what sounds very much like it. She is, in short, a darling, but she needs some lessons in a craft which its Hollywood counterpart only remotely resembles.

There is in addition, I hear, a belief among Hollywood writers that they are taking a dangerous chance in the theatre with plays dealing with Hollywood, and that the local critics, being not interested in Hollywood, are even more hostile to them than they are to Hollywood players. The writers seem, at least superficially, to have something in their favor there, since, including *Joy To The World*, there have been ten failures out of ten such plays in the last ten years. They may, however, be reassured that the plays have failed not primarily because they were about Hollywood, but because they were very bad plays and would have failed just as quickly if they had been about London, Paris, or Passaic, New Jersey. And they may, incidentally, be further reassured by the fact that in the same ten year period fifteen plays dealing in one way or another with religion and the Bible have also failed, which doesn't necessarily prove that the critics are disinterested in and hostile to God.

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Let one of the Hollywood writers write a Hollywood play as good as *Once In A Lifetime* and he will have nothing to worry about, particularly, as it seems, if he is wary enough to cast it with a lot of screen players, preferably not too gifted in acting.

MACBETH. MARCH 31, 1948

A revival of the Shakespeare tragedy, with incidental music by Alan Bush. Produced by Theatre, Inc., in association with Brian Doherty for 29 performances in the National Theatre.

PROGRAM

DUNCAN	Stephen Courtleigh	AN OLD MAN	Blair Cutting
MALCOLM	Elliott Reid	SEYTON	Harry Hess
DONALBAIN	Michael Reilly	A MURDERER	Paul Mann
MACBETH	Michael Redgrave	HIS YOUNGER ACCOMPLICE	
BANQUO	Geoffrey Toone		Whit Vernon
MACDUFF	Whitfield Connor	A LORD	Lamont Johnson
LENNOX	John Cromwell	A MURDERER AT FIFE	
ROSS	Hector MacGregor		Martin Balsam
ANGUS	John Straub	A DOCTOR	Russell Collins
MENTEITH	Paul Mann	A GENTLEWOMAN	Penelope Potter
CAITHNESS	Thomas Palmer	TWO WATCHMEN	{ Michael Reilly John Straub
FLEANCE	Ken Raymond	AT DUNSINANE	
SIWARD	John McQuade	A SINGER	Arthur Keegan
YOUNG SIWARD	Arthur Keegan	A PAGE	Sonny Curven
LADY MACBETH	Flora Robson	THE THREE	Robinson Stone
LADY MACDUFF	Beatrice Straight		Martin Balsam
SON TO MACDUFF	Judson Rees		Harry Hess
A WOUNDED SERGEANT		THE WEIRD SISTERS	Gillian Webb
	John McQuade		Julie Harris
			Ann Hegira
A MESSENGER AT IVERNESS	Robinson Stone	AN ARMED HEAD	Whitfield Connor
THE PORTER AT IVERNESS		A BLEEDING CHILD	Ken Raymond
	Russell Collins	A CHILD CROWNED	Marcia Marcus

SYNOPSIS: Scene. Scotland and, in one scene, England.

Director: Norris Houghton.

THE MACBETH ROLE has been played by various actors in often markedly various ways; I have in my day witnessed performances that were so wholly at odds with one another that they were sometimes befuddling; but, though they occasionally appeared to be absurdly exaggerated, I have never seen one that could not, if one cleverly argued

the case with oneself, be more or less justified critically. This does not mean that the actual performances were not at times poor, since it is not acting I refer to; it is the matter, rather, of conceptions of the role.

The more common of these has been one that lays the emphasis on the warrior's physical person, resulting in a stage projection remindful of the bull-ring style of acting which adorned the Wilson Barrett and Sienkiewicz Christian versus Pagan melodramas of the last century and which in that same remote era made most of the Othellos resemble so many Zbyszkos with a pain in the groin. While liberal traces of this interpretation still remain, a more recent one has tended to lessen the stress on the purely physical aspects of the role and to picture the character as having at least a few ounces of brain, not a bad idea since, despite some striking modern evidence to the contrary, Macbeth happened to be a king. The stage projection in this case has taken the form of interrupting the earlier unrelieved bellowing with periods of meditation at least relatively so quiet that one might hear a tholepin drop and which have suggested the character's pained cogitation in scowls of such furrowed depth that one could plant turnips in them.

Another concept is the dismissal in still larger measure of the physical element and the centering of the portrayal in the character's mentality, which gives rise at times to a performance which seems to be a muted cross between Hamlet, John Gabriel Borkman and Abe Hummel. This generally makes a considerable impression on the younger critics, who believe that any actor who gives emotions a full rein is ipso facto a ham, whereas any who does not, even if emotionalism in full tide is called for, is to be esteemed as an artist of very high intelligence. There is, also, a view of the character which shades the barbaric in him and invests him with symptoms of a later-day civilization, which latter in stage depiction assume the form of shearing off part of the established voluminous face whiskers, managing a gait devoid of strutting and more like that of a character in one of the less indignant dramas of

Eugene Brieux, and eliminating some of the conventional booming from the voice.

Still another idea is to play Macbeth like a combination Richard III, Ingomar and Max Schmeling, which is to say as a consommé of the sophisticated guile of the first, the barbaric guile of the second, and the doomed pugilism of the third. The acting out of the idea in turn resolves itself into a performance heavily laden with sudden vocal diminuos, indicating craftiness; intermittent abrupt changes from strong postures to slouches, indicating certain inner Machiavellian attributes; and periodic fiercely skeptical shadow-boxings with oneself. This has been known to be enormously successful, since, while the whole may conceivably not be satisfactory to an audience, the parts in their conciliatory nature are here and there bound to be, and since no one is thus in the end entirely disgruntled and everyone, indeed, left safely in some doubt as to the entire validity of his own analysis of the role.

There are, as well, other variations, some of them superficially not less eccentric, but those described are probably the most recognizable. And all, however now and again in whole or in share seemingly a little fatuous, may, as hinted, be reconciled in some degree with the tangled inconsistencies of the textual character which, full of splendor as it is, nevertheless, like a star sapphire, is susceptible to different rays of light, albeit some of a bluish tinge. For, as Hazlitt put it, "all is tumult and disorder within and without his mind . . . he has, indeed, energy and manliness of soul, but 'subject to all the skyey influences.' He is sure of nothing. All is left at issue. He runs a-tilt with fortune, and is baffled with preternatural riddles. The agitation of his mind resembles the rolling of the sea in a storm. . . ."

Each and every interpretation thus naturally has its partisans, though the actor offering it may for one reason or another be found wanting in the merchanting of it and, contrarily, though there have been some actors who, though their concepts of the role have not met with approval, have yet been acceptable in much the same way

that Babe Ruth always remained admired even when he struck out. Hazlitt, while he could not abide most of Kean's interpretation, still could not conceal his essential admiration for him in a review which, arriving at the acting of the scene after the murder, ended with the valentine that "it was a scene which no one who saw it can ever efface from his recollection." John Forster exceptionally could not in any degree stomach either Forrest's idea of the role or his execution of it: "Mr. Forrest is more singularly devoid of anything like an imaginative power than any actor we ever beheld"; but there have not been many unqualifying Forsters. There have been many more like Lewes who, in his review of Kean's performance, found, like Hazlitt, that "bad as the performance was, it had its fine points."

The fine point generally seems to be that the confusions of the role, while sometimes resolved by the critics to their own satisfaction, remain sometimes unresolved when it comes to the acting of it. Not the acting of it in what are or should be its more obvious aspects, but the acting of it in its more recondite particulars. These, however much the critic may confidently imagine that he has accounted to himself for them, continue to be somewhat shadowy; they may be rightly argued from one, two, even three viewpoints; and it is an obdurate critic indeed who in the circumstances refuses to be persuaded of the possibility of any other interpretation than his own. I have seen some Macbeths portions of whose conception and projection have seemed to me to be downright goosy, yet, as I have said, I have realized that it would not be too difficult to discover at least a small measure of reason for them in the cloudiness of the character. Three of the worst performances I have set eyes on were those of John E. Kellard, Philip Merivale and Lionel Barrymore, but if one looked hard enough one could find certain elements in them that disturbingly met the severest, intelligent test. And the same with the performances of Robert B. Mantell, Ben Greet, and a number of other such defectives. Novelli, in a class apart from the foregoing, on

the other hand was paradoxically most effective at those points in his performance when his conception of the role seemed from almost any critical position to be askew. I was too young to have seen Forbes-Robertson in the role, but I am told that, though his theory of it was frequently confounding, the net effect of his performance was eminently satisfying, quite as asparagus served out of course can still be both tempting and appetizing. These are only a few examples pro, con, and even pro-con out of many. But they sufficiently indicate the dizziness of the whole matter, which has equalled, if at times not exceeded, the fluster of the Hamlet question.

The latest exponent of the role is Michael Redgrave, the English screen actor. Though his approach to it may in part find substantiation in the text, you will have to search far for any substantiation of his performance of it in any text on the art of acting. With the concurrence of his director, Norris Houghton, he not only spends most of the evening downstage giving the audience the cute rolling eye and with dimpled smirk reciting his speeches but, when forced by the more violent action upstage, presents an excellent impersonation of a circus sideshow wild man conniving to become boss of the lot. His posturings, furthermore, are at moments a little comical, and his sudden shifts from Chopin to Wagnerian utterance stand in sore need of the ministrations of an orchestra conductor. Many of his readings, moreover, provide sounds to marvel at, notably in the banquet scene, where the delivery has the effect of the voice first timidly wetting itself at a waters' edge and then howling in childish alarm at its feel of cold, and in the passages relating to Duncan's coming, where the reading combines a kind of Foxy Quiller musical comedy hush-hush with the sort of coyly subdued physical pantomime associated with stock company ingénues when the juveniles overwhelm them with the long anticipated declarations of matrimony. The colloquy with Lady Macbeth following the murder becomes a mere schoolroom platform recitation made to pass for acting only in the circumstance that the Thane is in costume and makeup.

The "Is this a dagger" speech is read in the style of a stage prestidigitator prefacing a levitation act; and the "Tomorrow and tomorrow" lines with such bebop inflections that they acquire the sound of spoken jazz.

Flora Robson's Lady Macbeth, despite an air of star actress remoteness, is some better, but the fact remains that the role is not the difficult one legend has made it out to be. Women have occasionally failed in it, but any actress not too young and sufficiently experienced has not had too much trouble in giving a pretty fair account of it, for all the necessity seemingly felt by some critics to analyze the role out of its simplicity. The supporting company is mostly without distinction and appears to have been shoved to one side in order that the audience's attention may not be distracted too greatly from Mr. Redgrave's chance at an Oscar. The Banquo business is well handled and the duel scene better than usual, and the Paul Sheriff settings are pictorial enough and of a practical flow; but the performance on the whole gets only the thunder of the tragedy without any trace of its lightning.

In conclusion, part of a proclamation by Mr. Redgrave in connection with the presentation:

Another angle we are aiming to emphasize even more in the American production than in the London one is the keynote of contemporary realism. Very often costume plays in recent years have been criticized because their air of elegance, courtliness, of a highly civilized world of velvets and satins where everyone is scrubbed, scented, carefully combed, even the soldiers fresh from battle, gives audiences the feeling they are watching folk in fancy dress at a party. We are aiming in this *Macbeth* to reach back into a world of semi-barbarism, to mirror accurately a primitive people who slept in their clothes, had no time for haircuts, who didn't shave just before a battle for their lives. Down to the mud spattered on their boots, our Scotsmen we hope will look like they were, a wild, violent, strange race.

So far, good enough. But when the realistic effort to bring Birnam Wood to Tobacco Road has its appropriately costumed, tousled and bedraggled warriors lighted by an elaborate stage electrical equipment like the actors in *Music In My Heart* and a Macbeth in the person of Mr. Redgrave who very evidently has hurried to his dressing-room between scenes to freshen his lip rouge, the otherwise reasonable plan goes to pieces on the reefs of absurdity.

SIX O'CLOCK THEATRE. APRIL 11, 1948

A bill of three one-act plays. Produced by the Experimental Theatre, Inc., for 8 performances in the Maxine Elliott Theatre.

PROGRAM

HOPE IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS

OSCAR	<i>Philip Robinson</i>	CHARLIE	<i>Lou Gilbert</i>
DOC	<i>E. G. Marshall</i>	OLD MAN NELSON	<i>Daniel A. Reed</i>
STEVE	<i>George Mathews</i>	JOE	<i>Fredric Martin</i>
WILER	<i>Robert Alvin</i>	A MAN	<i>Jabez Gray</i>
SWEENEY	<i>Will Geer</i>		

CELEBRATION

RED	<i>Hilda Vaughn</i>	ELLEN BELLE	<i>Sally Gracie</i>
BABE	<i>Perry Wilson</i>	TOM	<i>James Karen</i>
SONNY	<i>Warren Stevens</i>		

AFTERNOON STORM

MARY	<i>Helen Marcy</i>	WEDDING GUESTS	<i>Philippa Bevans</i>
LIZZIE	<i>Eleanora Barrie</i>		<i>Ellen Herbert</i>
SPEED	<i>Dan Morgan</i>		<i>Fred Stewart</i>
ABE	<i>John Morley</i>		<i>Joseph Kramm</i>
NINIAN	<i>Stanley Tackney</i>		<i>Syl Lamont</i>
BRIDESMAIDS	<i>Lynn Masters</i>	ANN	<i>Clement Brace</i>
	<i>Herta Ware</i>		<i>Ed Kaufman</i>
	<i>Mary Patton</i>		<i>Joseph Kapfer</i>
	<i>Joan DeWeese</i>		<i>Joseph Anthony</i>
			<i>Norma Chambers</i>

Directors: 1. *Joseph Kramm*; 2. *Joseph Anthony*; 3. *John O'Shaughnessy*.

THE FIFTH EXPLOIT of what, to say it again, seems to be an experimental enterprise in little more than name assumed the shape of a program of three one-act plays. Before considering their nature, we may be justified in asking just where there is anything like genuine experiment in putting on such short specimens of drama of any kind. The American commercial and professional theatre in the

last forty years has already produced more one-acters, many of them deserving, than one can record without spraining a wrist. Among the producers of them have been such well-known managers and actors as the Lieblers, Charles Frohman, George Tyler, Morris Gest, Henry E. Dixey, Mrs. Fiske, James K. Hackett, Frank Keenan, Sarah Cowell Le Moyne, Arnold Daly (with no less than three or four separate programs), Holbrook Blinn, John C. Wilson, and divers others. The plays have included, among foreign dramatists, those of Rostand, Strindberg, Schnitzler, Yeats, Browning, Zangwill, Barrie, *et al.*, and, among Americans, a number of whom were tyros, the playlets of all sorts of writers like Clay M. Greene, Julian Street, Arthur Hornblow, George Ade, Gladys Unger, Charles Frederic Nirdlinger, Edmund Day, John Luther Long, C. J. Bell, Charles Kenyon, Edward Ellis, Russ Whytal, C. M. S. McLellan, *et al.*, and, if you must know, about four decades ago, a particular little cabbage by a boy named George Jean Nathan.

Non-professional groups have also been giving a hospitable hearing to native one-acters since and before the Provincetown Players ventured O'Neill's cycle of short sea plays, and vaudeville in its heyday often embraced in its bills playlets by a variety of American and foreign playwrights, among them, in the American department, Bronson Howard, O'Neill, Richard Harding Davis, Frances Hodgson Burnett, and lots of others. Three so-called "museum pieces" in the way of American short plays by John Howard Payne, Colin H. Hazelwood and John M. Morton were presented for a month's engagement eleven years ago in Daly's Sixty-third street house by a producer named Verdi. The Irish Repertory Theatre offered a program of Irish one-acters about twelve years ago, and even the Children's Art Theatre gambled on a program of four at about the same time. Eight years ago, Eugene Endrey offered a bill of four down in the Provincetown Playhouse; the New York Players Company did the same the year before, including playlets by Albert Maltz and Thornton Wilder (the same *The Happy Journey* recently re-

vived by the New Stages group); and the Lighthouse Players of the New York Association For The Blind in the same season put on three with blind young actresses forming the casts. Another such company, the Guild Center Players, followed suit with four one-acters, three by Americans, and all similarly performed by blind players.

The late Federal Theatre duly put on short plays; the New Theatre League sponsored two Negro groups in one-act play programs in 1938; the Workers' Laboratory Theatre some seasons ago produced a program of American short plays for a successful engagement in the Nora Bayes Theatre; the Yorke Center group followed with a program of four; and one loses count of all the rest. In the present season, we already had seen in the professional theatre two bills of three brief plays each by Noel Coward and the José Ferrer bill of four short Chekhov plays. I described in an earlier chapter one of the other ventures of the Experimental Theatre as being as experimental as pouring ketchup on beans. The present one enjoyed all the greater experimental daring of eating the beans after the ketchup was poured on them.

The first of the three little plays that comprised the evening was *Hope Is The Thing With Feathers*, by Richard Harrity. Relatively the best of the lot, it has to do with a group of vagrants, gathered by night in Central Park, whose problem is getting something to eat. One of them evolves several schemes to snare one of the ducks floating on the lake and, though the others deride him, persists in his quest but haplessly winds up instead with a monkey. The sardonic idea plainly has possibilities, but, while the author has realized some of them, the little play misses full achievement on three grounds. The comments on the breadwinner's stratagems by his fellow tramps appear sometimes to be studiously written into the characters instead of seeming to issue naturally from them; the dénouement involving the monkey, while perfectly legitimate ironic comedy, is in the handling a little too pat and in the nature of the tag of a musical show blackout skit; and there is occasionally the feeling that the down-and-outers

have been observed by the author through a proscenium arch rather than through eyes trained upon fact and actuality. There is, in other words, a suspicion of Dusty Rhodes and Nat Wills in the characters, the sense of a slight touch of greasepaint, the comic strip, and vaudeville. Yet, under it all, Harrity betrays a glimmer of talent that may develop.

The second item was *Celebration*, by Horton Foote, an attempted serious picture of the degeneration of Southern aristocracy. It is a forced and artificial job so exaggerated that it seems to be a refugee from an old Minsky show. There would scarcely have been any experiment in its production even if produced as part of such a burlesque enterprise.

The third short play was *Afternoon Storm*, by E. P. Conkle, whose longer play also about the young Abraham Lincoln, *Prologue To Glory*, saw local production ten years ago. In this case, the author considers the doubts that assail Abe regarding Mary Todd just before the marriage ceremony. Mary is presented with a lack of sympathy bordering on contempt, and Lincoln as a monologist torturedly informing himself at some length that it isn't desirable to marry a woman whom one doesn't love, the while being persuaded by the spirit of the deceased Ann Rutledge that honor is honor, that he is stuck, and that there is no other course open to him but to lie in the bed he has made for himself. A few moments of Abe's rationalization of his predicament come across the footlights with some conviction, but the play for the most part bogs down in a swamp of attitudinized words.

The incidental general use of the familiar bare stage technique hardly added to any sensational experimentation.

THE RATS OF NORWAY. APRIL 15, 1948

A play by Keith Winter. Produced by James S. Elliott for 4 performances in the Booth Theatre.

PROGRAM

ROBIN CLAYDON	MANN	Arthur Gould-Porter
Colin Keith-Johnston	WEYLAND	Victor Wood
JANE CLAYDON	CHETWOOD	Bert Jeter
Jeanne Stuart	HUGH SEBASTIAN	John Ireland
STEVEAN BERINGER		
William Howell		
TILLY SHANE		
Rett Kitson		

SYNOPSIS: The action of the play takes place at Fallgates, a preparatory school in Northumberland, over a period of seven months. Act I. The beginning. Act II. The middle. Act III. The end.

Director: James S. Elliott.

A BADLY MUDDLED playwright's badly muddled play has been even worse muddled by his producer and stage director, industriously assisted by his actors. To start, the rats of Norway that figure in the author's symbolic title are the lemmings the oft-told tale about which, he says, provided the inspiration for the writing of his play. His program note thereon is as follows:

There is a town on the coast of Norway from which, every few years, many thousands of lemmings swim south into the North Sea. They swim on and on until they are all drowned. The reason for this eccentric conduct on the part of the lemmings is that many years ago there was an island some distance from the coast. The island is now submerged. No lemming has ever returned to tell the tale, so the great battalions continue to set forth on their fatal emigration. In the play, the story centers around two pairs of lovers, one young and romantic, the other mature and passionate. Both are seeking blindly and with an increasing desperation for a perfection of love which the very violence of their search prevents them from finding. So, like

the rats of Norway, they finally drown their spiritual selves in their quest for the impossible.

It might have profited both Mr. Winter and his play if he had taken the trouble to explore the myth, as Bergen Evans has in his *The Natural History of Nonsense*. "The actual lemming," he notes, "does no such thing," referring the skeptic to Charles Elton's *Voles, Mice and Lemmings* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press). "The march to the sea," he continues, "is merely a crowding into the coastal plains of excess numbers that are periodically bred in the hills. It is an irregular movement of individuals and often takes years. The creatures are able to swim small streams, and it is possible that some reach the ocean, swim out beyond their power to return, and drown. But the grim phalanx, the death march, the fatal instinct, and the cosmic irony of it all are figments of modern pessimism. . . ." Even Masfield, who in *The Lemmings* succumbed in small part to the fable of the fatal urge, allowed, as Evans observes, that it seizes the rodents only once in a hundred years.

Furthermore, granting Mr. Winter his faith in the truth of the fable, he yet giddily confuses himself in the analogy of the search for perfection of love, since it is very hard to make out a search for perfection of any kind on the part of the lemmings, who are concerned simply with getting a foothold on dry land. This is not to say that the author's thesis, apart from the superstition, may not be reasonable enough. That violence in a search for perfection of love may very well prevent its achievement and bring ultimate pain is probably not questioned by experts in such matters. Nor doubtless is the argument that such perfection is impossible. But Mr. Winter so quickly loses all grasp of the idea and so rattles himself that the theme flies right out the window, flapping its tin wings like a mechanical toy bird and making noises like a corkscrew trying vainly to open a bottle of soda pop. His older couple, for example, far from any noticeable search for perfection in their amorous attachment, are selfishly concerned, on the female side, with financial security and the safeguarding

of social position, and, on the male, largely with an objection to the discomforts of *al fresco* cohabitation. And his younger pair imply that it is not perfection they are intent upon but, on the female side, rather the safety to be had in a speedy marriage and, on the male, the avoidance of the sexual act and the equally puzzling quest of a woman who will determinedly refuse to mold herself to his tastes and prejudices. In other words, what the characters actually impress one as being after, in the case of both couples, is not perfection but imperfection, which, if wittily handled, might have made a much more intelligent and better play.

The author's dramaturgical technique, which follows the old German custom of alternately bringing on the couples to conduct their colloquies, only adds to the feeling that what is going on on the stage is not so much a play as a series of static duologues. And when at rare moments there is the faint suspicion of a play, the director does everything possible to allay it. He also, in his capacity of producer, has augmented the over-all jumble by publishing in the program brief accounts of the various characters which fail to dovetail with the characters one sees on the stage. The faculty member in love with the headmaster's wife, for example, is described as one "who clings to reality as a drowning man would to a life-preserver," whereas the play reveals him as one who seeks desperately to avoid reality in drink. The wife, it is noted, is a woman "whose brains make up for Robin's (her husband's) ineffectualness," but the stage shows her as having no brains whatsoever. And so with several of the others.

It is of course possible that Mr. Winter's play, which was produced successfully fifteen years ago in England, has been edited by other hands into a measure of its present disorder. Some of the dialogue certainly does not sound as if it had been written by the author of *The Shining Hour*, which at least was literate. I am told, indeed, that his novel of the same title from which he derived the play had points of merit. But the exhibit as we here get it is garbled at times into a dramatic and thematic chaos

that offers, among its other contradictions, a potential homosexuality in the two men who are presented by the dramatist as fiercely possessed of passion for their lady loves.

The acting company could scarcely be worse, though direction must take its full share of the blame. Colin Keith-Johnston, ordinarily a congenial actor, indicates the elderly gravity of the headmaster of the boys' school mainly by pressing his chin down hard upon his collar and issuing such sounds as suggest he has swallowed an operatic dog. John Ireland plays the headmaster's wife's moody lover by withholding his chin from his collar but nonetheless managing to issue sounds not materially dissimilar; and stage direction has further imposed upon him the necessity, when a heart attack overcomes him, of falling with a crash upon the keyboard of a piano, a piece of business one thought had abandoned the theatre for the films years ago. As the philandering spouse, Jeanne Stuart spends the evening composing herself into a series of aloof living pictures, which, I take it, are supposed to denote her mental superiority to the other characters but which insinuate rather that the actress is so fascinated by herself that she is rooted admiringly to the spot. William Howell and Rett Kitson, as the younger couple, perform as if a big television show were going on in the auditorium and as if they were so engrossed by it that the play, to their obvious impatience, gets in their way. Of the others, only Victor Wood, in the role of a cynical member of the faculty, manages not to be too silly.

When they come across a review like this, various critics of these annuals are in the habit of deploring what they uniformly allude to as "Mr. Nathan's occasional savageness." Certainly not in any extenuation but just for the fun of it, I quote from my more charitable colleagues' opinions of the play:

The more genteel Mr. Atkinson, in the *Times*: "In time the actors and the audience will recover, but at the moment the play, which was dumped on the stage at the

Booth, seems to have added ten years to the life of everyone on both sides of the footlights."

The more benevolent Mr. Watts, in the *Post*: "Terrible . . . dull . . . ridiculous. One of the most incredible things in writing, direction and acting encountered all season."

The more tender-hearted Mr. Barnes, in the *Herald Tribune*: "It takes a number of factors to drive a lot of first-nighters out of their seats before a final curtain. *The Rats Of Norway* has them. A ridiculous script badly acted, woefully staged and preposterously designed. A series of clichés which defy description."

The more spirituel Mr. Morehouse, in the *Sun*: "Dreadful stuff. A dull and doltish play, and the acting is fairly monstrous. Everything is woeful and doleful and the final curtain falls on tragedy. It just didn't fall soon enough. One of the most frightful performances a cast of professional grown-ups has given in my time."

The more indulgent Mr. Chapman, in the *Daily News*: "An occasion of acute discomfort, like double pneumonia."

The more benign Mr. Garland, in the *Journal-American*: "Even two-legged British lemmings couldn't be as dim-witted as their trans-Atlantic setup makes them out to be."

The more forbearing Mr. Hawkins, in the *World-Telegram*: "The general lack of civility is simply offensive. Trite . . . embarrassing. Gives the feeling of a period piece and sounds as if the radio and telephone had not yet been invented."

The more beneficent, compassionate and merciful Mr. Coleman, in the *Daily Mirror*: "The biggest bore of the season. The curtain seemed as if it never would fall. The running time is not excessive, but an evening at the Booth seems like a veritable lifetime. Packed with clichés which sent the first-nighters into spasms of laughter, that is, those first-nighters who suffered from insomnia and the on-stage noises. How the actors waded through Winter's stilted,

pretentious twaddle without howling is a mystery. They must have wonderful control of their facial muscles. If any organization has a spare medal around for the most feeble and futile play of the season, they might consider *The Rats Of Norway.*"

TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH. APRIL 18, 1948

A play by Eva Wolas. Produced by New Stages, Inc., for 2 weeks' performances in the New Stages Theatre.

PROGRAM

ADAM	Anthony Randall	WOMAN	Jean Gillespie
MICHAEL			Florence James
	Raymond Edward Johnson	SINGERS	George Stephens
ZILLAH	Judy Somerside		Georgette Clark

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *An early morning.* Act II. Scene 1. *Tea time; one week later.* Scene 2. *That evening.* Act III. *The following morning.*

Scene: *The Palace Primeval.*

Director: *Ezra Stone.*

MY FIRST SORTIE into belles-lettres, at the ripe age of ten, like that of many other school children was what I was pleased to speak of as an "essay" on Adam and Eve. And one of my earliest theatrical recollections, of the same period, is of either a Charles Yale or Hanlon Brothers extravaganza — I can't quite remember which — that opened with a scene in the Garden of Eden. While I do not profess to be an expert in the Freudian metaphysic, it is my guess that the tale's spell over youngsters lies in what seems to them its scandalous nature, and it is not a guess but a certainty that what has appealed to musical show producers about it has been the chance it has afforded them to present, safe from moralist interference, the spectacle of a female in a state approximating the altogether. Since a number of such American and European producers have not been much advanced beyond adolescence, the stage has duly regaled us from time to time with the old papier-mâché trees and bushes, the green grass mat, the rubber snake coiled in the foliage, and, for double safety behind a scrim, the show-girl either in a skin-tight white silk union suit or with her virginal body covered with enough whitewash to plaster the Sistine Chapel, and

in both cases with a fig leaf the amplitude of the cocopalms cooly attached to her center. So enticed, indeed, has the musical stage been by the idea that only the scene in Hell has outfavored it, and the dramatic stage, in each instance, has rivalled if not surpassed it, though somewhat more circumspectly in an anatomical direction. From twelfth century plays like *Le Mystère d'Adam* to seventeenth like *Adam In Exile*, that stage in far days fondled the idea with a motherly affection, and the affection has continued into modern times with all kinds of performances from Shaw's *Back To Methuselah* to Čapek's *Adam The Creator* and from one such Broadway paraphrase as the Bolton-Middleton *Adam And Eva* to another. All but a notable few have approached the theme more or less obviously, and all without exception have very evidently been tempted to it by the comparative novelty of its background, which at least in these later years has plainly come to enjoy all the newfandanglement of the Hell business.

Miss Wolas is the latest playwright to be overcome by the moldy conceit, and her treatment of it, if it must be told, is as sallow as can be imagined, even by a fancy with the wings of an eagle. From the beginning, when she proceeds from the orthodox battle-between-the-sexes viewpoint, to the middle, when she indulges in the old stuff about Adam and Eve discovering, to their surprise and pleasure, the physical perquisites of love, and on to the end, when Adam is banished from Eden for his sin and Eve follows him on the road to a future Cecil B. DeMille movie, there is not the slightest wit, taste, or invention. I do not wish overly to boast, but I have a feeling that that school-boy essay of mine which, as I recall, drew an analogy, if excessively juvenile, between Adam and Eve and Crown Prince Rudolf and Marie Vetsera, the great romantic scandal of the day, was at least a little more fertile in originality.

Miss Wolas' details are not less of a starkly unimaginative nature. Her Adam has visions of Woman as being lighted by the stars, only subsequently to find her a com-

monplace, practical and nagging creature. Her Eve, following the cut-and-dried modern historical spoof pattern, is pictured as being identical with a present day messing housewife. Her Serpent, as may be guessed, is a kindergarten raisonneur out of a Mae West saucepot who counsels Adam that the best way to go about handling Eve is to get down quickly to what may euphemistically be termed bedrock. And she has her last curtain fall on the twain's exit into the world with the hint that they will go on bickering until the end of time. In the whole there is no trace of illumination save that provided by the stage's electrical switchboard, which doesn't work any too well at that.

The style in which the play is written pursues that favored by contemporary writers of drugstore shelf anachronistic fiction, which is to say a mixture of the vernacular, Biblical quotations, and the kind of sex suggestiveness once miscellaneously sprayed over the local stage by the Wilson Collison school of farce plumbers. The characters are drawn and played much as their counterparts were in the college musicals of our youth, though girls here act the girl roles in place of boys. The Serpent is thus a young woman clad in a sausage-skin of black lace who depicts Temptation by slinking around the stage like Harpo Marx in lascivious underwear and making wicked eyes at Michael, the guardian angel. Eve, when Adam begins to show signs of restlessness, duly restimulates his interest by arching a bare shoulder at him and simultaneously uncovering her leg up to the legal limit. Adam is the anticipated combination of Keith Winter protagonist and *La Belle Hélène* caricature. And Michael, like the play altogether, misses only the wires to pull him out of sight into the flies.

THE CUP OF TREMBLING. APRIL 20, 1948

A dramatization by Louis Paul of his novel, Breakdown. Produced by Paul Czinner and C. P. Jaeger for 31 performances in the Music Box.

PROGRAM

MRS. BOSSHARDT	<i>Beverly Bayne</i>	A POLICE OFFICER	<i>Robert Bolger</i>
ELLEN CROY	<i>Elisabeth Bergner</i>	A DELIVERY MAN	
DR. BROEN	<i>Philip Tonge</i>		<i>William Robertson</i>
JOHN CROY	<i>Millard Mitchell</i>	DR. DENNING	<i>Martin Wolfson</i>
WALTER FOWLER	<i>John Carradine</i>	WILLIAM LUNDEMAN	<i>Anthony Ross</i>
JAMESSON	<i>Louis Hector</i>	PEEWEE	<i>U. T. Atherton</i>
ANN	<i>Iris Mann</i>	SHEILA VANE	<i>Arlene Francis</i>
GRACIE	<i>Hope Emerson</i>		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The Croys' apartment, 10 p.m. Friday.* Scene 2. *Walter Fowler's home, Saturday afternoon, six weeks later.* Scene 3. *The Croys' apartment, that night.* Scene 4. *The same, next morning.* Scene 5. *The same, late the following afternoon.* Act II. Scene 1. *Dr. Denning's office, afternoon, ten days later.* Scene 2. *Lundeman's office, early the same evening.* Scene 3. *The Croys' apartment, a few days later.*

Director: *Paul Czinner.*

ELISABETH BERGNER, it has come to be recognized, is an actress of mannerisms all compact. As a student of mannerisms, I lay proud claim to some experience, since among those of many others which I have investigated I may number my own, which at times have been known so to irritate people that they have catapulted themselves from my presence with such precipitant haste that at least thirty, including a child of ten, have tripped over one another in the grand rush and broken their legs. Miss Bergner may be no more conscious of hers than I, alas, have been of mine but, unlike me, she has the misfortune to have to make a living out of the public on a stage and, if only a relative handful of the public can't stand mine in private, I don't see how she can expect any such handful to be multiplied into box-office thousands by eccen-

tricities which far exceed even my own, adequately vexatious, I blush to record, as they seem to be.

As in Miss Bergner's case, I am sorry to report that I seem to be most unacceptable when I secretly imagine that I am most fascinating, and, also like her, I am apparently least desirable when in my own estimation I am little short of irresistible. The difference between us is that, being a critic by profession, I am able to recognize what is wrong with me, though I can't help myself, and that she, being like almost any other actress without the critical gift, isn't able to do any such thing, doubtless admires her behavioristic frillery, and probably wouldn't do anything about it if she could.

Though her well-meaning critics have been pointing out to Miss Bergner for a long time now that her manifold affectations are damaging to her stage impression, she continues to go sublimely on her way and year after year permits them seriously to weaken the effect of her performances. Like some other actresses who are convinced, sometimes rightly, that the critics do not know what they are talking about and that, even if they do, it is beneath an actress' dignity to listen to them, she will not unlearn what, in her case, she inexpediently learned under German direction in the days of her Berlin career and, unlearning, adapt herself more accommodatingly and a lot more worthily to an American stage where her idiosyncrasies seem all too exaggerated and even invested with something of a burlesque sauce.

At this point, however, I am beset by the feeling that perhaps I am doing her a slight injustice and that it is possible she may at last be realizing the danger of her excesses. The feeling overcomes me in view of the character of this most recent play which she has elected as a vehicle. It is conceivable that the central role in it, that of a female alcoholic, struck her by its very nature as a legitimate cover-up of and apology for her fantastic singularities, since even the dumbest critic might have a deal of trouble finding fault with the physical and vocal peccadillos of an actress playing the role of a woman on the road to delirium

tremens. If Miss Bergner did this deliberately, I tender her my congratulations on her shrewdness, even if the play she has chosen gives me the heebie-jeebies along with her. It makes all her bad acting attributes seem under the dramatic circumstances to be a proper part of the role which she portrays; it converts her irritating artificialities into logical appurtenances of the boozy character; and it fools many members of her audience into believing that, as with the late Henry Irving in *A Story Of Waterloo*, she is an artist extraordinary when what she analytically is is rather only a second-rate actress more or less successfully concealing the fact in a role manufactured for that very purpose.

Mr. Paul's play is based on his novel, *Breakdown*, which was another of the numerous recent recesses from literature picturing the horrible consequences of alcoholic indulgence. The play is even worse than the book. The plot may easily be guessed: the woman who gradually finds herself in the grip of the bottle, her disintegration, the futile attempts of her loved ones to rehabilitate her, and her eventual redemption at the combined hands of psychiatry, the organization known as Alcoholics Anonymous, and the author. To work my own redemption after it was all over required the combined hands of two bartenders.

Miss Bergner's great success with past German audiences has often been a source of local speculation. I think it may be explained in at least one direction. It has been commonly believed as an article of the American Credo that the Germans' admiration was always reserved for women and actresses who most closely resembled over-developed beer barrels, both fore and aft, or what is known in our lingo as the Hausfrau type, and that any one of some physical delicacy was impatiently waved aside as an ogre. Like many other American ideas about foreigners, the theory has small basis in fact. Far from a distaste for the more unsubstantial specimens of femininity, of which Miss Bergner was one, the German in those days and before, as doubtless still, elected just such German women, aside from any acting ability, as his favorites, both on the stage

and screen. I name a few in illustration: Helene Thimig, Lillian Harvey, Renate Mueller, Hertha Thiele, Marlene Dietrich, Camilla Horn, Meta Illing, Gertrud Eysold, Maria Orska . . .

Anyone who knew Berlin in the years between the Kaiser's reign and the rise of Hitler need hardly be informed on such matters. For the Germans then — and it was in that period that the young Bergner came to eminence — had the same affectionate eye to slender loveliness that we have and did not, as the comic strip historians would have us think, reserve their personal ecstasy solely for the talented tubs of lard who disported themselves in the classical drama and on the grand opera stage.

The acting of the supporting company and Czinner's stage direction are as spurious as the playwright's apparent theory that a person suffering from alcoholomania may be completely cured, restored to perfect health, and delivered into the lap of God in little more than a week.

 THE PLAY'S THE THING. APRIL 28, 1948

A revival of the comedy by Ferenc Molnár, adapted by P. G. Wodehouse. Produced by Gilbert Miller in association with James Russo and Michael Ellis at the season's end for indeterminate performances in the Booth Theatre.

PROGRAM

SANDOR TURAI	<i>Louis Calhern</i>	ILONA SZABO	<i>Faye Emerson</i>
MANSKY	<i>Ernest Cossart</i>	ALMADY	<i>Arthur Margetson</i>
ALBERT ADAM	<i>Richard Hylton</i>	MELL	<i>Claud Allister</i>
JOHANN DWORNITSCHKE		LACKEYS	<i>Fred Wentler</i>
	<i>Francis Compton</i>		<i>Ted Paterson</i>

SYNOPSIS: *The three acts are laid in a room in a castle on the Italian Riviera.*

Director: *Gilbert Miller.*

NOT ONLY a great deal of water has passed under the bridge since the comedy was first shown here in 1926, but on its surface has floated so many plays-within-plays that the comparative novelty of the piece has become a bit gray at the edges. I say comparative because the play-within-a-play device, together with the written evolution of the play within the play as in this case, was already familiar to local audiences before Molnár again employed it. It was indeed already familiar considerably previous to its repeated use by the Messrs. Hamilton and Thomas in *The Big Idea* back in 1914, and how many times it has been resorted to since and before Sheridan by playwrights both in America and Europe only a toilsome search through the records would disclose. Molnár's handling of it is superior to most, since he is a man of style and wit, and his comedy, for all its dramaturgical dust in that direction, consequently still contributes to the theatre a pleasant evening.

The plot, it may be recalled, deals with a young composer who, accompanied by two older friends who are his

collaborators on his first undertaking in the operetta line, unexpectedly one night visits the habitat of a well-known prima donna to whom he is affianced. From her bedroom issues conversation with one of her former lovers the tone of which the young man can not mistake and which prompts him in his disillusion to contemplate suicide. To save him from his mortal despair, one of his collaborators, a playwright, persuades the deceitful lady of his sentimental passion and her lover to help him work out a short play in which the incriminating sexual conversation will figure as part of the dialogue. The little play is subsequently acted; the young composer is overwhelmed by joy to learn that his suspicions were base and that his beloved was simply rehearsing the dialogue when he eavesdropped the bedroom doings; and all ends commodiously.

It is plainly as difficult to attend any such trick play twice and still be held by it as it is to be held a second time by any mystery or detective play. In this instance, however, the playwright's delicate waggery serves to make one not too greatly conscious of the trick machinery, and, as noted, the evening is hence much more acceptable than in the case of most similar plays. For, in addition to the author's smooth jocosity, there is for anyone professionally interested in drama his uncommon skill in technique. The trick itself may be all too recognizable, but the way in which it is done is so dexterous that it becomes a fascinating trick on its own account.

Though Hungarian is a language omitted from my education, I had always suspected, despite assurances to the contrary, that the play had not only been toned down for local consumption in its bedroom episode but that some of the humor in it was so little like Molnár that it was probably incorporated by the adapter. My suspicion has been confirmed by Professor Emro Joseph Gergely in his recently published treatise on Hungarian drama produced in New York in the 1908-1940 period. He points out that some of the original spicy dialogue has been softened and also that the adapter has interpolated some humor of his own, as, for example, such passages as

Why are you so late?

I fell down stairs, sir.

Well, that oughn't to have taken you so long.

And, when the butler serves an elaborate breakfast with the observation, "It was a labor of love, sir. My heart is in that breakfast," Turai's reply, "Your heart, too?"

While the present company in the aggregate is not as finished as the earlier one (at this point let me say that if the customary worm either contends that memory is playing pranks on me or, worse, that I am one of those old duffers who arbitrarily believe that what they saw in the past is always better than what they see today, I'll step on him), it is in fair degree accommodating enough. Some of the sheen and gloss is missing, and a little more ease wouldn't hurt, but, in view of everything, it will do very well, particularly as regards the Messrs. Margetson, who as usual proves himself to be a first-rate comedian, Calhern, and Allister, who has been resurrected from the original troupe.

 INSIDE U.S.A. APRIL 30, 1948

A revue with music by Arthur Schwartz, lyrics by Howard Dietz, and sketches by Arnold B. Horwitt, Moss Hart, and Arnold Auerbach. Produced by Arthur Schwartz at the close of the season for indeterminate performances in the Century Theatre.

PRINCIPALS

Beatrice Lillie, Jack Haley, Estelle Loring, John Tyers, Thelma Carpenter, Valerie Bettis, Eric Victor, Carl Reiner, Jane Lawrence, William LeMassena, Lewis Nye, and Herb Shriner.

Directors: Robert H. Gordon and Helen Tamiris.

MY SENTIMENTAL AFFECTION for the female sex in the mass, if manifestly not in the particular, is of an enormity almost equal to that which I feel for Philadelphia scrapple and people who kick dogs. But, whatever its lamentable lack of volume, it still remains sufficient to make me gag at most women who offer themselves on the stage as low comedians. There is something about the spectacle of such women making obscene cartoons of themselves that is not only far from funny but that, though I am not an overly fastidious man, has much the same effect on me as the smell of banana oil. Since most of those who follow the peculiar profession are gargoyles to begin with, the view of any such one exaggerating her countenance and person into the semblance of an even more hideous monstrosity is not what I would enthusiastically describe as priceless humor. And when the gargoyle further adds to the picture the croaks, yelps, howls, leaps, grimaces and physical contortions concomitant with the stage species, my pleasure is comparable to that which I might derive from a bad case of hookworm.

There are, I am aware, men who feel differently and who find themselves highly entertained by anatomical ugliness, sexless ferocity and debased femininity masquer-

ading as comedy. And on the rare occasions when for a moment or two the material is sharply relevant to the spectacle I can understand their reaction, in a measure. But in the general run the material isn't anything of the kind and is further of the sort that would be pretty toxiferous even if performed by the most beautiful woman in the world, and all that consequently remains is the pathetic vision of a woman befouling every possible appetizing quality of her sex and in the process sickening all but the sourest misogynist.

One of the few exceptions to the genre is Beatrice Lillie. Not only is she agreeable to the gaze in the suitable biological departments, but she is so exceptionally endowed with the comic gift that she has no need, as have many of her sister professionals, for indulgence in obstreperous grotesqueries to hide an absence of it. She can accomplish more with a flutter of the hand than they can with their entire repertory of physical gyrations, and more with the simple wink of an eye than they are able to with all their raucous vocal bursts, displays of gnarled knees, and savage facial distortions. She is able, in short, to be amusing without deforming her person; she can make one laugh without the disturbing consciousness that one is laughing at a cripple; and she can entertain with no recourse to the wit of an anatomy clinic. Happily assisted by Jack Haley, a sprightly comedian in his own right, she, with him, works wonders with a show that short of the twain might find itself in large difficulties, even though it contains several assistant performers of merit. But since it is not the business of a reviewer to depress himself with such possibilities and rather his duty to report on matters as they are, the evening by and large may be said to be passable enough. After all, the world we live in may have many things wrong with it, but one can nevertheless find elements in it to amuse if one looks hard enough.

Looking thus into this show, there are several good songs, one or two fairly diverting sketches, some rousing dancing by Valerie Bettis, and a nightingale in the person of Estelle Loring with a fresh green salad appearance, all

of which, I suppose, should suffice to make up for its arid spots. Not much imagination has gone into the evening, but imagination is a quality that has not been too visible in most of our revues for some years now, and its presence might conceivably upset audiences who apparently do not like comfortable habit to be disturbed. Though, for example, the show is supposed to be based on John Gunther's exploratory tome of the same title, its only relation to it is a few ditties with such titles as "Come To Pittsburgh" and "Rhode Island Is Famous For You," and some scenic backdrops faintly picturing various cities like New Orleans, Chicago, San Francisco, etc. The whole hasn't even the coherence of the several past shows based on Jules Verne's *Around The World In Eighty Days* and less even than the ones that have borne such local titles as *About Town*, *On The Town*, and *Make Mine Manhattan*.

It is not my job to rewrite musical revues, but it might have been suggested to the authors that there was a possibly available satiric idea in indicating through a shifting American panorama that New Yorkers, for all their much touted sophistication, are not at bottom any different from the people in Bugtussle, Texas, that the balloon-busting nights at the Stork Club have their counterpart in the bubble-busting nights at Herman's Tip-Top Tavern in Pascagoula, Mississippi, and that there are more native born New Yorkers in Omaha than are left in New York. *Inside U.S.A.* as it stands is for the most part simply *Inside Glen MacDonough* or inside any of the other writers like Harry B. Smith, Edgar Smith, George V. Hobart, Sydney Rosenfeld, *et al.*, who were concocting revues at the turn of the century.

But, as I have often remarked, one no more goes to such a show in a strictly critical mood than Leigh Hunt went to a cock-fight. When it is good, there is nothing to complain about, and when it isn't you can divert yourself by looking at one of the prettier girls. You go, in a word, not, unless you are inexperienced in such things, in the hope of being stimulated by wit and novelty but much as you go to visit a tolerable old aunt, in the hope of getting at least

a few cookies and, if the old girl is a relative on your father's side, maybe even a bit of a tipple. It isn't so bad, at that, particularly, in both cases, if and when a good-looking daughter happens to appear on the premises.

* * *

And so, since these annuals conclude their reports with the dawn of the first of May, another theatrical year ended.

* * *

You are now, ladies and gentlemen, about to get the most seditious communiqué ever put into print by a dramatic critic at the conclusion of any such period. At the close of each season, as you are only too well aware, it has long been customary for members of the clique to pull out of the mothballs the old testimony as to how weary they are after ten months spent in the artificial world of make-believe and what a rapturous relief it will be to betake themselves back to nature, whether in the country, the seaside or foreign parts, where the welcome smell of fresh earth and reality will assuage their souls. I am now soon also about to take leave of the theatre for a while and, along with the others, to seek a holiday among the bees and the flowers and, as for me, I say the hell with it. I am fed up not only on the bees and the flowers but on the seaside and foreign parts, and I would not mind it a whit and would even enjoy it if some good plays were overnight to be announced for immediate production which would keep me right here. I would get a deal more pleasure and rest any day looking at an interesting play or an amusing show than fighting against bugs and mosquitoes, cutting my feet on beach pebbles and colliding with squashy jellyfish, or paying fifteen dollars for a sliver of horse-meat slathered with oleomargarine mayonnaise in a Paris black market restaurant. And it would be much better all around for what is left of my soul.

But not, apparently, for the colleagues, to hear them tell it. Even the least of them, come this time of the year, seem suddenly to become nature lovers, and with such a

passion for the highroad and wide open spaces as has not been matched since Fra Diavolo. The running brooks, an acquaintance with which has previously been confined to the Leone restaurant's fish stream or the outdoor garden at the Ritz, promptly acquire a consuming fascination for them, though dampness of any kind in the ten earlier months has disturbed their sinuses to the point of unspeakable agony. The sound of the sea waves, which for years they have loftily ridiculed when it has reached their ears in plays like *Granite*, *'Ception Shoals*, *South Pacific*, and even *Medea*, becomes irresistible to them. And foreign parts which presently offer all the comforts of a third-rate American slum suddenly achieve in their eyes an overwhelming allure.

They can have them. While, like them, I am off to the wilds from long habit, I should a lot rather stay put. I shall come back, I know, with a sun tan which will persuade idiots that, since I look so well externally, I must be as physically fit on the whole as a youth of twenty. I shall lie that I had a wonderful time, that there is nothing like getting away from the grind for a spell to reinspirit one with the old pepper, and (with the usual wicked wink) that I met no less than a dozen girls of enough animal magnetism to put Ringlings' circus out of business. I shall have spent all my money, sprained an ankle or two, eaten a lot of foul food, protestingly drunk cocktails made of indecent gin, suffered a wrecked sacroiliac from sleeping on corduroy mattresses, and been bitten on the eyelid by a wasp. What is more, it will take me at least two months to get back to writing anything that will conceivably be worth reading.

In the several volumes of *The American Credo* which I published years ago, I seem to have failed to include, among the innumerable beliefs and superstitions of my fellow-countrymen, this nonsense about vacations. Yet more than almost any other, it continues to exercise its witchery over them. It is not, I daresay, that most people honestly feel the necessity for a holiday. It is rather that it has become traditional that they take the holiday

whether they wish to or not, and so they obediently go through the annual routine much as they automatically make an annual shambles of often gratuitous house-cleaning. Nor is it by any means only the congenital sheep who succumb to the buncombe. There surely has never been a dramatic critic — it is with such that I am principally dealing — who has been more intelligently, even assertively, independent, most of the time, than Bernard Shaw. Yet in the end he deferred to the temptations of the manure belt like the rest of his craft.

It is thus when tradition demands of me that I leave all the comforts of home, all the fascination and ease and enjoyment of the city, and reluctantly drag myself away to regions beyond, that a profound dejection settles upon me. After an hour or two of lying under the trees and staining my trousers with an ineradicable green, I would welcome the relief of even another *Dr. Social*. After getting my mouth and ears full of salt water and enough sand in my hair to fill all the cigarette extinguishing jardinières in the Waldorf-Astoria, I yearn for another look at even *The Rats of Norway*. And going to bed in London on sheets so watery from fog that I expect the Rhine maidens to start singing any moment, or languishing in the gardens of the Tuileries on a bench souvenired by several babies, or getting dysentery from the quarts of olive oil on everything in Italy — these, too, are scarcely the sort of raptures that compensate me for what I have left behind.

I have not the slightest doubt that much of the success of John Gielgud's revival of *The Importance Of Being Earnest* was attributable to Wilde's animadversions on the country, since it is one of the well-known characteristics of Americans that they enjoy laughing at things which reflect on themselves and their habits. It was, accordingly, that those critics who profess never to be so blissful as when they are sleeping next to a horse, preferably Percheron, or a cow, laughed most handsomely at such lines as "When one is in town one amuses oneself; when one is in the country one amuses other people; it is excessively bor-

ing." By and large, nevertheless, the fact remains that these brethren have actually cajoled themselves into believing that the country is all that the poets, especially those who have never left London, Paris, Venice or New York, have claimed for it. It is these brethren who persuade themselves that the birds at Wopplehauser's Crossing sing more beautifully than ever did Geraldine Farrar, that the moon in the heavens above Mead's Corners, New Jersey, is always more golden than Jo Mielziner's, and that the flowers in Putchnick Falls, Pa., are more luxuriant than those in Wadley and Smythe's. My blessings on them, and may they rest in peace. Cockney that I have come to be, I will give them all the dripping ceilings, out-of-order plumbing, unskimmed milk, damp walls, stuck bureau drawers, mosquitoes, pictures of a stag at bay, rutted roads, soggy bread, sleep-destroying crickets and roosters, oil lamps, outhouses, cow profiterolles, three-day-old newspapers, rainy Sundays, stewed chicken, greenheaded flies, spiders and the rest of the bucolic delights for one little room and bath at the St. Regis, with the bar not too far away, with the floor waiter handy, and with the orchestra below playing *Tales From The Vienna Woods*.

Especially Interesting Performances

LOVE FOR LOVE

*Cyril Ritchard
Pamela Brown
Jessie Evans*

THE HEIRESS

Basil Rathbone

COMMAND DECISION

*Paul Kelly
Stephen Elliott
Paul Ford
James Whitmore
James Holden*

DUET FOR TWO HANDS

Francis L. Sullivan

MAN AND SUPERMAN

Frances Rowe

MEDEA

Judith Anderson

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

*Melville Cooper
John Buckmaster
René Ray*

POWER WITHOUT GLORY

Marjorie Rhodes

STRANGE BED- FELLOWS

Doris Rich

MAKE MINE MAN- HATTAN

David Burns

THE LAST DANCE

Oscar Homolka

THE RESPECTFUL PROSTITUTE

Meg Mundy

JOHN BULL'S OTHER ISLAND

Hilton Edwards

GHOSTS

Alfred Ryder

THE OLD LADY SAYS "NO!"

Micheal MacLiammoir

MR. ROBERTS

*Henry Fonda
Robert Keith
David Wayne*

THE DRUID CIRCLE

*Leo G. Carroll
Ethel Griffies
Neva Patterson*

THE WINSLOW BOY

*Alan Webb
Frank Allenby*

FOR LOVE OR MONEY

June Lockhart

ANTONY AND CLEO- PATRA

Godfrey Tearle

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

*Jessica Tandy
Marlon Brando
Karl Malden*

THE GENTLEMAN
FROM ATHENS

Lou Polan

CRIME AND PUNISH-
MENT

Vladimir Sokoloff

VOLPONE

John Carradine

THE HALLAMS

Mildred Wall

THE PLAY'S THE
THING

Arthur Margetson

INSIDE U.S.A.

Beatrice Lillie

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